

How to Create the Perfect Deer Plot

Article by Gerald Almy.



Forget picture-book plots. Those rolling green carpets, where a single plant species grows uniformly lush from one edge to another—they don't cut it for mature deer. The ultimate big-buck food plot looks ragged, uneven, disheveled. The traits that make this plot ugly are the very things that will make savvy older bucks visit during shooting light. These two pages reveal a perfect hunting plot, detailing 15 key elements that will make it your personal hunting hotspot this fall.

1.) Size

Look for a plot site that is 1/2 acre to 2 acres. If it's any smaller, deer will destroy the crops before they grow. If it's any larger, mature bucks will be wary of using it during daylight, or may show up too far away for a clean shot.

2.) Wind Direction

You need to be able to approach and hunt stands with the wind in your face or perpendicular to the direction of typical deer traffic.

3.) Sun Angle

Choose flat sites when possible. Otherwise, pick a slope facing east or northeast, which will get morning sun when the soil is cool and avoid full late-afternoon sun that can wither crops in dry, hot weather. If possible, position the plot so deer look into the sun as they approach.

4.) Shape

Follow the natural contours of the land. Long, skinny plots are preferable to square ones

because they provide more edge, where a big buck can feel safe using the plot, only steps from cover.

5.) Bedding Areas

Put your plot strategically close—from 100 to 200 yards—to prime doe bedding cover (e.g., grassy fields or areas with scattered cedars, pines, and honeysuckle), and twice that distance from thicker, more rugged and remote buck beds. A funnel with good cover leading from beds to feed seals the deal.

6.) The View

Plant a row of white pines if necessary to shield any view of the plot, or the big bucks using it, from a road or public hunting area.

7.) Stand Locations

Make sure the site offers good stand trees for both bow and gun hunting. Look for potential staging areas to catch a buck waiting for dark to enter.

8.) Summer Annuals

To draw bucks in summer and early fall, plant lablab, cowpeas, sorghum, buckwheat, sunflowers, or a mixture such as Power Plant in May or June. Add a few rows of corn and forage soybeans. Together, these yield tremendous food production and some grow tall enough to provide extra cover.

9.) Fall and Winter Annuals

As summer annuals die off, deer favor brassicas and cereal grains as frosts raise their sugar content. From June through August, plant a mixture of rape, kale, and turnips, plus a separate patch of sugar beets or pure turnips. Between August and October, put in wheat and/or oats mixed with crimson clover.

10.) Perennials

Planted in spring or fall, these last three to seven years and provide food for deer year-round in the South and for nine or 10 months in the North. Large white clovers (ladino), intermediates like Durana, and blends such as the Whitetail Institute's Imperial Whitetail are best. Mixtures that include chicory are good for summer droughts. Alfalfa-and-clover mixes do well in drier uplands and sandy soils. Small burnet is great for poor-quality soils.

11.) Tall Grasses

Plant a few strips of native warm-season grasses, such as switchgrass, Indian, and bluestem. These grow 5 to 7 feet tall and make bucks feel secure using the plot during daylight.

12.) Junk

Pull deadfall or large treetops into the plot with a tractor for added cover. Or cut some cedars and pile them by hand.

13.) Rough Edges

Mature deer don't like a stark switch from mature woods to a low, open plot. Create transition cover along the edge by felling or hinge-cutting some low-value trees. If there's a possible buck approach route that would swing downwind of a good stand location, block it with some of these cuttings.

14.) Shrubs

Red osier dogwood, Tatarian honeysuckle, Chickasaw plum, chinquapin, indigobush, lespedeza, and blackberry provide security and an extra food source where deer enter.

15.) Fruit Trees

For the ultrawary buck that refuses to come out in the open, plant a few apple, pear, or persimmon trees at the plot's edge and hang your stand upwind. His sweet tooth will bring him right to you.

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