



Planting a Wild Turkey Food Plot

The reason most hunters want a food plot is to increase sightings of turkeys. Planting a choice food source will likely increase sightings and provide opportunities for harvest success. A good food source with some edge manipulation together will keep turkeys close. They like to dust, so some disking along woodland edges will give birds some dusting sites. With these disk areas, weeds usually grow as cover providing seeds and insects as a source of food for turkeys. Even with abundant natural food, quality food plots will attract these birds.

A food plot for hunting should supply a quality food source during hunting season. For spring hunting, you want an abundance of seed and insects to provide needed protein for the reproductive requirements of hens. Plots are excellent strutting locations for gobblers to show their stuff.

Plots should be from 1/2—2-acres in size and be long and narrow in shape. A mature wooded area should be close by. A food plot should be available for every 25 acres of mature timber. Turkeys will use the timber for roosting and foraging for acorns. They love acorns.

It is suggested that you consider companion cropping for food plots. This is the act of planting more than one crop on an area. The benefits will include forages available for a longer period of time, reduced chances of crop failure and increased plot attractiveness for other wildlife.

Remember, when planting mixtures in the food plot, reduce individual seeding rate. A rule is to plant in strips. This allows you the opportunity to evaluate the different crops you have planted. Agricultural crops like soybeans or corn grow in the summer but supply food during winter months if allowed to stand. Specialty crops like chufa will draw birds once they learn to scratch the bulbs out of the soil. Uncovering some of the chufa tubers will introduce the birds to this food source. You will be able to determine their presence by watching for their scratching signs.



Chufa

Wheat, oats, and annual rye grass planted in the fall provide early spring attraction for seeds forming on these crops and emerging insects. Oats should be the choice here.

Ladino clover will be utilized when leaves form in early spring and throughout the growing season.

There are many other options, but these should give you a great start to attracting these creatures within sight if cover and habitat are nearby.

| Food Source | Rate to Plant |
|-------------|---|
| Chufa | 10 lb. per 1/4 acre [this crop should be planted on 2 acres if deer pressure is high] |
| Ladino | 1/4 to 3/4 lb. per 1/4 acre |
| Soybeans | 15 lbs. per 1/4 acre |
| Corn | 2—4 lbs. per 1/4 acre |
| Wheat | 12—15 lbs. per 1/4 acre |
| Oats | 10—15 lbs. per 1/4 acre |
| Rye | 1/2—2 lbs. per 1/4 acre |

To determine fertility, soil test and apply lime and other nutrients accordingly. Nitrogen will need to be applied to wheat, oats and rye grass in late winter also to corn during the summer.

For hunters, establishing a wild turkey food plot can be a rewarding experience. Use this guide as a reference and work with your county Extension office or IDNR wildlife biologist to help make your project a success.

Turkeys prefer thin stands of vegetation and may not use lush food plot areas. Sow at suggested rates. More may not be better.



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