

Top 10 Mistakes Landowners/Hunters Make When Establishing Supplemental Forages

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In East Texas, our precipitation rates of over 40 inches annually are generally enough to establish both warm and cool season forages for white-tailed deer. Remember, for a forage variety to be successful, it should meet the nutritional requirements of the deer, be available during either the warm or cool season stress period, produce sufficient yields to justify establishment costs and not compete with the availability of native food sources. Check out these 10 mistakes and avoid them as you plant forage crops for your deer herd:

10. **FAILURE TO SOIL TEST:** Acid soils found throughout East Texas can limit forage production and fertilizer benefits. Soil tests will determine lime needs and allow for recommendations of the exact fertilizer applications necessary for the crop to be grown. Don't guess—Soil test!
9. **FAILURE TO INOCULATE LEGUME SEEDS:** Legumes are plants that fix nitrogen from the atmosphere using bacteria that grow on the plant roots. Legume seeds are inoculated with the appropriate inoculant at the time of seeding. This process provides the growing plant a tiny nitrogen application every day and can boost forage production and nutritive value. Examples of legumes include peas, beans, and clovers.
8. **FAILURE TO PLANT SEEDS AT THE APPROPRIATE DEPTH:** Most seed is planted too deep. The smaller the seed, the shallower it should be planted. Tiny seeds should be covered to a depth of only about 1/4", while larger seeds such as beans, peas and small grains should be covered only to about 1" in depth.
7. **FAILURE TO PREPARE A PROPER SEED BED:** Most varieties require planting into a seed bed that is well disked and fairly smooth. However, certain varieties may only require planting with a drill without extensive seed bed preparation. Make sure you know the seed bed preparation requirements for the varieties to be established, otherwise poor stands and excessive weed competition may result.
6. **SELECTION OF THE WRONG PLANTING SITE:** Don't plant a variety that prefers a well-drained soil in a poorly drained bottomland or vice versa. If a site is subject to routine flooding during the plant's growth cycle, look elsewhere for a planting location.
5. **SELECTION OF THE WRONG VARIETIES FOR YOUR REGION:** It's easy to get caught up in the hype and slick advertisements accompanying some forage varieties. However, just because a variety does well in Iowa or Tennessee does not necessarily mean it will perform well in East Texas. Don't be afraid to experiment, but don't put all your eggs in one basket by

planting all sites with a new variety until you know how it performs in a few test plots.

4. FAILURE TO PRACTICE FOLLOW-UP MANAGEMENT AFTER PLANTING:

Remember that some varieties require no follow-up fertilization after plants have germinated and begun growing, but this does not apply to all forage varieties. For example, have you noticed how those plots of wheat, oats or rye start looking a little yellow in December or January? That's a sign you need to follow-up with a top dressing of nitrogen fertilizer. Other plants, such as arrowleaf and crimson clovers readily re-seed every year. However, this process is helped along if you will shred and lightly disk these clover plots in late summer each year.

3. FAILURE TO PLANT THE RIGHT SIZE PLOTS: Here is a rule of thumb—In the Fall, plant numerous small plots so the deer will always be close to escape cover and will feel more comfortable using the plots during the hunting season in daylight hours. For warm season forages, plant fewer, larger plots which can be located away from cover some distance. Typically East Texans fail to plant large enough bean or pea plots for summer grazing—If the deer wipe out 3 or 4 acre plots due to overgrazing, then double or triple the size of the plots next year. A good rule of thumb is to plant from 1-3% of your land base in food plots, with the emphasis on warm season forage establishment to improve the nutritional plane during the critical growing season.

2. FAILURE TO PLANT AT THE CORRECT SEEDING RATES: Planting too little or too much seed may result in poor stand establishment, excess weed competition, a waste of money or all three! Follow recommended seeding rates for the varieties selected for establishment.

AND THE NUMBER 1 MISTAKE LANDOWNERS/HUNTERS MAKE WHEN ESTABLISHING SUPPLEMENTAL FORAGES IS FORGETTING THAT :

IF A FORAGE SOUNDS TO GOOD TO BE TRUE—IT PROBABLY IS!

We are still searching for the perfect forage, that allows for a one time planting that provides for all a deer herd's needs 12 months out of the year! So far, it doesn't exist. Remember, one test is worth 1000 expert opinions, so by all means try different forages, but always plant them side by side with varieties that you know are proven winners so you will have something to compare to the new variety.