

## Food Plots - part 2

By David Falkenham, UNHCE Extension Educator, Forestry & Wildlife

Last month's article spoke about the basics of food plot preparation and the breakdown of the three types of food plots: annual wildlife plots, clover plots, and hunting plots. Each type of food plot has different physical and economic factors that must be determined by the landowner when laying out food plots. This month I want to talk about the actual layout and maintenance of the plots.

As mentioned in my previous article, annual plots are the cheapest and require the least maintenance of all the food plots. If this is the only plot you choose for your property you will not spend much money or effort and you will attract a large diversity of wildlife to your land. Annual plots should be mowed every one to five years. This low maintenance allows you to place them on the farthest reaches of your land as long as you can get to them every few years with a tractor. It is a good idea to mow these plots late in the year, August or September, to allow the ground nesting birds that are using these openings to fledge and head south.

Clover plots are my favorite. They are a nice balance of providing a great nutritional food source for wildlife, and aside from the initial cost and effort of building the plot, they are pretty low maintenance and they can be grown on a variety of soil types. The key to good clover plots is to mow, mow and mow a little more. I recommend mowing clover plots three times per summer; starting in May and the last mowing should be around the middle of August. Given this, you should locate these plots any place on your land that you are able to get mowing equipment to three times a year. There are three reasons for mowing clover: 1. Mowing provides a steady supply of mulch for your plot and this does cut down on fertilizer costs. 2. Mowing is a disturbance and it causes the clover to spread its root system and its seed, thus increasing the volume of the clover. 3. Mowing "freshens up" the clover by keeping it young and tender. This improves the taste and the nutritional value of the clover. If clover is left all summer without mowing it becomes stiff and unpalatable.

Hunting plots are pretty high maintenance, and usually require equipment such as disk harrows, but if you have the time and ambition go for it, they act like a deer magnet. These plots need to be harrowed and re-planted once a year so they should be located where you can get to them with equipment. They also require good loamy, rock-free soil because you will be harrowing once a year. Abandoned agricultural land works well, or any place where rocks are in limited supply. Despite the extra effort required, hunting plots are a lot of fun because they allow you to try so many different types of seeds that are on the market; brassica, kale, turnip, rye, wheat, oats...the list is endless and if it doesn't work this year, harrow it up and try something new next year.

Some helpful hints:

If you don't have access to a tractor and don't want to pay for all that mowing, consider purchasing a DR Brush Mower. These handy mowers can cover a lot of territory and they are rugged. Since they are pretty small, you only need a narrow trail to get to your

plots. The only drawback to these is the mowing deck is not that big so mowing anything more than two acres takes some time, but it is a cheaper option and is good exercise.

Locate your plots in areas with thick brushy cover. This added concealment will encourage daytime use of your plots by wildlife. Regenerating clear-cuts work great.

If your plot is larger than one acre, allow islands of brush and trees to grow inside the plot. This too will help critters feel safer using your plots, thus increase usage.

When designing your plots, consider a long narrow shape. It might cost less money if the excavator can move up one side of the plot and down the other side, stumping as he goes rather than moving in circles, pulling all of the stumps.

For more information feel free to call me at the UNH Cooperative Extension office in North Haverhill (603-787-6944).

Look for next week's column from the Extension office.

*The University of New Hampshire Cooperative Extension is an equal opportunity educator and employer. University of New Hampshire, U.S. Department of Agriculture and N.H. counties cooperating.*