

## Beyond Deer Food Plots – What else can I do to attract deer?

By Nancy H. Garlock, Consulting Forester

The deer population is down, so you followed the advice and planted food plots on your property, with the soil samples, the fertilizer, lime, and careful seed choices...and then nothing! The deer did not come as planned. What went wrong? Probably nothing. Food plots are great for attracting deer to your property, and keeping them safer from TB infection, but there are other aspects to consider to bring in the deer.

White-tailed deer are browsers, which refer to all above-ground food sources from our many species of trees. If you have a park-like forest, it is great for you to site in on a deer, but it gives them little to interest them, to bring them onto your property. If you can't reach the choice leafy growth, neither can the deer. Perhaps it is time to contact a consulting forester to see if a harvest within your forest is in order, to regenerate your forest and bring the flush of new growth back into it.

Though many people hate to cut trees, old-growth aspen needs to be cut to open the canopy and to trigger the roots to produce new seedlings. Oaks can be aided by planting their acorns and/or fencing areas around them to protect their acorns from the deer and other wildlife who will vacuum them up before they have a chance to grow. Also, harvesting a few oaks can help them regenerate more quickly. The recent research shows that oaks have their best chance of surviving our deer as stump sprouts, with a fully established root structure.

Enhancements of wildlife shrubs can add to the cover and the variety of food on site, planting to make a more undulating edge, keeping in mind your current shooting lanes. Crabapples, hazelnuts and even lilac can have a positive impact on attracting wildlife. The hedge outside my garden is proof enough, being well-browsed to create the thickly branching shape wanted and to give the deer a good food source. Be sure to match your shrub choices to your soil type for best results.

In addition to food, the deer need to feel safe while eating and bedding down for the night. Are there any conifers on your property? Is your food plot in need of sources of cover to help it to be better utilized? Plantings of conifers along the edge of your plantings may aid you and the deer. Utilize non-browse species like varieties of spruces and balsam fir. Pines can also be used, but they are an acceptable food source to deer, so may need tree protectors or fencing. Northern white cedar and hemlock can be planted on moist sites, but must be fenced, as they are like candy to the deer herd.

These suggestions assume that you have goals for your land. To reach these goals you need a well thought out plan. The Montmorency Conservation District has resources and a list of consulting foresters that can help you do this.

Additional resources:

Managing property for White Tailed Deer

[http://www.michigandnr.com/publications/pdfs/huntingwildlifehabitat/Landowners\\_Guide/Species\\_Mgmt/Deer.htm](http://www.michigandnr.com/publications/pdfs/huntingwildlifehabitat/Landowners_Guide/Species_Mgmt/Deer.htm)

DNR Publication: Forest Foods Deer Eat

[http://www.michigan.gov/dnr/0,1607,7-153-10370\\_12148-61306--,00.html](http://www.michigan.gov/dnr/0,1607,7-153-10370_12148-61306--,00.html)

Improving Habitat for White-Tailed Deer on Private Woodlands

[http://forestry.msu.edu/testmsaf/PDF/Dudd\\_Deer.PDF](http://forestry.msu.edu/testmsaf/PDF/Dudd_Deer.PDF)

Alpena and Montmorency Conservation District Forest Management Professionals

[http://www.montmorencyd.org/resources/Resource%20Specialist%20List09%20\(2\).pdf](http://www.montmorencyd.org/resources/Resource%20Specialist%20List09%20(2).pdf)

Michigan Directory of Consulting Foresters

<http://forestry.msu.edu/extension/extdocs/consulfor/consult.htm>

Society of American Foresters Directory of "Certified" Foresters

<http://www.safnet.org/certifiedforester>

A brochure by the Society of American Foresters about certified foresters

[http://www.safnet.org/certifiedforester/servingthepublic/cf\\_brochure.pdf](http://www.safnet.org/certifiedforester/servingthepublic/cf_brochure.pdf)