



Wildlife Journal

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Building the Herd - Forage Plots for Blacktail Deer

Leased hunting lands allow the hunter to participate in the



management and health of the animals within the leased area. Forage plots have been demonstrated to produce

healthier high quality deer. You can use food plots to attract deer to your hunting lease area.

Blacktail deer are browsers, thus they tend to move more and feed on brush, nibbling a bit here and a bit there as they walk through their feeding areas. You may have noticed this in your yard, they don't eat the grass, but they nibble their way through the flower beds, fruit trees and

garden being selective in what they eat. They are focused on "sweet" smelling and tasting vegetation. For blacktail deer several small food plots of "sweet" vegetation will draw and hold deer to your lease area while providing them nutrients they need. There are commercial seed mixes available that were developed for whitetail deer that you can use for blacktail deer or you can use a "sweet" forage, such as grey oats in western Washington. A mix may be better because of the variety of plants and how and when
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The local advice we get is for oats and peas or a mix of sweet forage, but you may want to try one of the many mixes developed for whitetail deer. We have listed links to web sites that provide forage.

Sources of seed for hunting plots:

Ask your seed supplier for seed best suited for our local area.

- www.buckforage.com
- www.cabelas.com
- www.evolved.com
- www.heartlandwildlifeinstitute.com
- www.hunterspec.com
- www.plantbiologic.com
- www.tecomateseed.com
- www.whitetailinstitute.com

Rayonier has not tested these products and does not endorse these vendors, they are simply provided for your convenience. We would love to hear your experience using any of these products.

**For more information
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they grow. Some species are better for spring sowing and others better for a fall sowing. Check your hunting supply stores, the internet, farm and garden stores for oats, fall rye or commercial seed mixes. Do not use grass, red clover alfalfa or other courser plants. Follow the directions on the forage seed bag or for grey oats sow in May about an inch deep in the soil. You will need a garden rake to pull the duff layer of needles off the soil layer. Make grooves with a hoe or rake about 1 inch deep and sow the oat seed about a half a pound of seed per 100 square feet, which is equivalent to an area 10'x10' or plant the seed in between the rows of planted tree seedlings. Do not cut or remove any small trees. Rake the soil back over the seeds and then apply about a half pound of 10-20-20 fertilizer and 2 pounds of lime to the same area to give your oats a quick boost. You can sprinkle a very thin layer of duff over the area just partially covering the soil to hold the moisture in the soil. Then walk back and forth over the area, compacting the soil around the seeds. You may also want to lay some dead branches over parts of the area to keep the deer from nibbling all the oats off to the ground.

The site you pick for forage plots should get lots of sunlight. Sunlight is the key so a recent timber harvest area along new roads can be an ideal location. Road cutbanks that are hard or dry will not grow crops; look for areas that are moist and loose. You may not cut down trees or use equipment to create openings so be sure to sow around the small trees in a recently planted area. The deer will find the sweet forage food wherever you plant it, but a location near cover would also help them avoid predators. Once your forage plot is located the deer will return many times during the year and in future years. A consistent forage program developed over several years will pay off for the long term hunter. A fall planting of a cool weather sweet cover crop with the first rains will be a welcome winter food source during and after the rut.

You will naturally want to check on your forage plot area so we suggest planting one close to your vehicle parking spot that you can check but leave the others alone. One of the big advantages of a lease area is the reduced disturbance of the game. Blacktail deer are very smart and nervous so the less disturbance the better.