



UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS EXTENSION

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Seeding Legumes into Food Plots

Today there are so many food plot choices for deer hunters that one gets dizzy just looking down the list. Let's try to keep things simple. One of the easiest ways to establish a food plot is to over seed a legume. Over seeding is a simple way to create a food plot area to observe and attract deer. Legumes are nitrogen fixing plants which include red clover, ladino clover, alfalfa and lespedeza all of which will work by over seeding an area this time of year. These areas can be seeded through April 15 but earlier applications will be more successful. An ATV equipped with a broadcast seeder is an excellent tool for this practice.

Red clover should be broadcast at 8 to 10 pounds per acre. Ladino clover seed should be sown at 1 to 1.5 pounds per acre. Red clover will grow taller than ladino clover but ladino clover will stay around longer. Both of these are perennials but red clover will only last for two years.

Alfalfa can be broadcast over an area this time of year but the stand success rate will be lower than the above clovers. If one chooses to try alfalfa then 10-12 pounds should be sown. Alfalfa works best in areas with little or no grass cover.

Common lespedeza seed can be purchased as hulled or non-hulled. The hulled seed should be broadcast at 15-20 pounds per acre and the non-hulled rate should be 20-25 pounds per acre. The good thing about lespedeza is that it will grow in lower fertility areas and tolerate more acid soil conditions.

Of all of these legumes, alfalfa will require the highest fertility. Red clover and ladino clover require moderate fertility.

Over seeding is an option for areas with limited cover. Heavy cover areas should be mowed first to reduce competition. After legume establishment the area should be mowed again early in the spring to reduce weed or grass competition.

If seed bed preparation equipment is available then drilling these legumes could be an option. If the seed is going to be drilled into the soil then rates can be reduced to the following: red clover 6 pounds, ladino clover one-half pound, alfalfa 6 pounds and lespedeza 15 pounds.

The food plot soil area should be tested and fertility added accordingly. But for now one should broadcast 200 pounds per acre of 6-24-24 minimum.

The food plot should be located close to some cover and with the addition of a legume now the area should soon be green and lush.

Inoculation helps the new seedlings to fix atmospheric nitrogen and makes it available to them. Inoculate the seed just prior to actual seeding. Be sure the inoculant is labeled for the legume you are sowing. It is best to moisten the seed slightly before mixing the inoculant. An old wash tub works great for this process. Pour in part of a bag of seed, lightly sprinkle with water, add some inoculant and mix the contents. Repeat this process until inoculant is thoroughly mixed with the seed. Most one-pound packages of inoculants will do 60 pounds of seed.



Nighttime photo taken with trail camera of deer feeding at a food plot.

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