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Spring Food Plots – I know that turkey season is in full swing and the fish are starting to bite, but now is also a good time to start planning for a successful deer season. Many hunters will plant a fall food plot of rye, oats or some type of clover and/or winter peas. These areas will usually help increase the chance of seeing a deer and harvesting that monster buck, but now is the time of year when nutrition is essential for deer growth and antler development. A diet of 13-16% protein is optimal for antler development.

Any of you who have looked through the Bass Pro Shops catalog or GON have seen a multitude of food plots. Some of these are mixtures of a small grain and a legume. Others are mixtures of legumes such as white and red clover or possibly alfalfa. What you need to consider before planting anything is the type of preparation that can be accomplished on your site. Alfalfa, and most of the clover seeds are very small and under most conditions require a very well prepared seed bed. You also need to consider what amount of light is required. A narrow strip in 30 foot tall pines will probably not be productive due to low light levels. Some other important factors are: soil type, fertility and pH. Proper pH and light are probably the biggest limiting factors in producing quality forage in a food plot. Now is a good time to get a soil sample and apply lime if needed. Lime takes about three months to fully affect the soil. Applying lime at the time of planting will not help what you have just planted for at least three months. Another major problem that we see in food plots is weed competition and control.

There are several seed mixtures available that produce quality forage and are suited to our area. Clovers and clover mixes will do fairly well in our area. Other legumes such as lab lab and beans can produce quality deer forage, but weed control is often difficult or virtually impossible. Something that I like to recommend because it produces quality forage and weed control is simple is Round Up Ready soybeans. These are soybeans that are modified to be resistant to glyphosate, which is the active ingredient in Round Up. This works well for people who don't have a pesticide license or for those of us who are planting plots in remote wooded areas. One draw back to soybeans and some of the other annual legumes is overgrazing. For this reason we do not recommend these types of plants in areas that have high deer pressure, or in food plots less than one acre. If you have a large area or low grazing pressure this is a great way for you to provide high quality food for your herd and keep weeds out of your summer food plot. With these tips you can provide the nutrition required to grow that big buck, while at the same time getting him used to that spot where your fall food plot will most likely be.