

Hunting Your Food Plots

Hunting Your Food Plots - Food plots used the right way can significantly improve your odds of harvesting a trophy buck. Food plots established at the proper time will become included in a deer herd's feeding pattern. Food plots established just before the hunting season begins have less of a chance of being included in a deer herd's feeding pattern. Routine is the name of the game with game. Turkeys and whitetail deer develop feeding routines and change only when food sources change. This does not mean that they feed the exact routine everyday but they seem to visit their favorite food sources nearly every day at some time of the day or night. Deer do not feed constantly, they browse for an hour or two then they lay up somewhere and chew their cud. All ruminants regurgitate the vegetation they consume and re-chew the food and re-swallow. They cannot do this while walking so they go to a secluded spot and spend a couple of hours chewing their cud. After a while they will get up and continue their browsing for another couple of hours on their normal feeding range followed by a rest to chew their cud.

Many hunters go to their food plots before daylight stay a couple hours go back to the lodge or camp ground then late afternoon they go back to the food plot and stay till about dark and go back to the lodge. This routine is easily observed by deer and they change their daily feeding rounds accordingly. So first of all we need to consider the things you should not do when hunting food plots.

Permanent deer stands or blinds are not good. Mature bucks will always check these stands from downwind and stand and watch for movement in the stand. The buck only has to see someone getting in or out of this stand one time to imprint the location and always be very wary of this stand. Guess what he will remember it year after year and only the young spike buck will probably walk anywhere near this stand. Portable blinds or tree climbers carried to the food plot the morning of the hunt is the best way not to give away your location. Of course you must still use stealth and hopefully have already pre scouted the location for your blind or climber.

Have enough food plots that you do not hunt the same plot every day. Try to hunt one plot in the morning and different one late afternoon. Don't put your blind or stand in the same location every time you hunt a specific plot, have several different spots picked out. If you do this you will notice that some time a deer will ease up to the plot and stare at the tree you were in the previous day proving you were spotted going up or coming down that tree.

Don't put your blind or climber in a tree right on the edge of the food plot. Be back in the woods a tree or two where you can still see most of the food plot but you will be more camouflaged. Deer very seldom just walk out into a food plot during hunting season, they ease up to the edge and stand very still looking over the plot for any movement or smell before easing out into the plot. Also, the mature buck probably is not going to walk out in the plot during daylight hours anyway and will stay back in the woods downwind from the food plot to keep watch on his doe. So you need to be back in the woods somewhat and be downwind. If your food plot has been there since the early spring there will be deer trails to and from the food plot. If you locate these trails then scout around off this trail and you will probably find another trail that is much dimmer than the main trail. This dimmer trail is the buck's trail he uses downwind of his doe on the main trail. The benefit of knowledge of this trail is you need to be downwind of the dimmer trail if you want to get a chance at a mature buck. If you are downwind of this dimmer trail you are way ahead in the hunt if you can stay still. The doe are going to come down the main trail and probably ten to fifteen minutes later the mature buck will come down the dimmer trail staying downwind of his doe. Also, his attention is going to be the doe and the food plot not so much the woods downwind of him.

Your movement is your worst enemy of being detected by this buck. You will find there are several trails that lead to and from your food plot and this is due to the fact that winds change from time to time and all the deer want to come in to the plot from downwind. You need to do the above scouting for all these trails and dimmer trails and the morning of your hunt determine the wind direction to make sure you are downwind of the "right dimmer trail". You will notice that along these dimmer trails are antler rubs on trees and saplings. Since the buck's primary reason for being near the food plot is just to keep an eye on his doe he eliminates the boredom of waiting on his doe to move on by rubbing his antlers and strengthening his neck for future battles. Don't become locked into the daylight till midmorning and late afternoon till dark routine. Many times bucks have been up all night chasing doe and go lay up just before daylight. They may get up around eleven a.m. and slip through the woods checking scrapes and looking for the doe that peed in his scrape. These bucks will use their dimmer trails to locate the doe because the doe uses the main trails almost always. So, you may want to consider being (very still) in your stand from 10 a.m. until 3 p.m. and sleep in while all your

buddies head out to woods before daylight. Another thing to consider is the mature buck has already patterned this early morning and late afternoon hunting and knows everyone goes back to the lodge during the middle of the day. Also, you will probably have all the woods to yourself when hunting the middle of the day. I have personally harvested more bucks in the middle of the day than early morning or late afternoon. Give it a try sometime and be very still.

Now that we have discussed the proper placement of your deer blind or tree stand for optimal ambush of a mature buck near your food plot let us talk about how to hunt. If you can't take shower with sent proof soap and dress in unscented clothing the morning of the hunt, carry pruning shears with you to your blind and cut some pine or cedar branches putting them all around you providing you with a cover scent. Cover your hands with gloves and use a head & face net. Most important of all is to position yourself where you are looking in the direction you expect to see the deer. This eliminates the need to move anything except your eyes. I can't over emphasize this & be very still. Most hunters are detected by the mature buck from moving around in the stand or blind. Even moving your head to try and look at the sound of cracking limb may give your position away. I have watched bucks stand still for thirty minutes never moving a muscle just eyeing his surroundings. He knew I was there but could not see me or smell me this instinct is a sixth sense mature bucks develop with age. This buck was looking directly at me and I did not move and finally after thirty minutes he moved on down the trail providing me with a shot. If I had as much as moved an inch he would have been gone. Just be still and do not move and you will be a more successful hunter. In the southeast states it is very hard to rattle up bucks for the same reason & movement. You can't rattle without moving your hands and the buck is going to come to the sound downwind and stop way short of you and stand very still and look in the direction of the sound & he will usually see your hands clanging the rattles. Out west and areas where there is not much vegetative cover you can see the buck coming from downwind towards the rattle and be ready. In the thick cover of the southeast it is almost impossible to see the buck coming before he sees you rattling.