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Edition**

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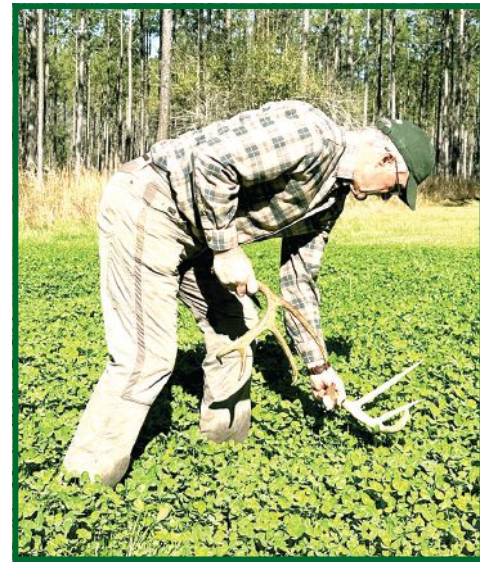


THE KOHLER CHRONICLES:

Advice & Anecdotes from a Third-Generation Land Broker

by Jon Kohler, JD
Broker / Partner

JON KOHLER ASSOCIATES



Deer season is closed... it's time to get to work!

"THESE ARE TWO GUIDING PRINCIPLES: The harder you work, the luckier you become; and you reap what you sow. These principles apply to wildlife management as well. Friends and clients who find consistent success are those who work hard and go the extra mile in managing their properties," said Walter Hatchett. (Photos courtesy of Jon Kohler & Associates)

by **Walter Hatchett and Brett Bryan**

A friend recently wrote this on a chalkboard at our hunting lodge, and it resonated with us. Having grown up on a farm and always enjoying working the land, our passion for land management and hunting drives us to cultivate food plots that benefit wildlife, especially deer, turkeys, ducks and even elk.

Through decades of experience and having worked with several clients,

including David Morris, renowned biologist and founder of Tecomate, as well as Tecomate Biologist Mark Newell, we've discovered that factors like soil type, weather, timing of planting and deer herd density significantly influence food plot success.

Having managed recreational properties in North Florida, South Georgia and even in Colorado and Wyoming, we've learned that the effort you invest

in your land directly impacts the results you achieve.

As we look ahead, it's essential to start preparing in the springtime for the upcoming hunting season. We conduct a lot of scouting and stand setups in early spring, right after the season ends. It's much easier to spot trails, old scrapes, rub lines and bedding areas when the trees aren't fully leafed out. We use this information to adjust our stand locations and plan our entry and exit routes.

Most hunters start to hang it up when they are missing out on the most important time of year for whitetail hunters to have a successful season the next fall. This may include constructing new hunting stands, establishing new food plots, incorporating proper deer nutrition and placing feeders in new locations.

Spring is a pivotal time for wildlife, making it the ideal moment to undertake important tasks such as performing control burns, planting trees that yield beneficial mast or fruits and managing food plots for optimal growth. The early spring months are also when bucks start to regrow their antlers – which, let's face it, is one of the things we are all after.

Although winters in North Florida and South Georgia are generally mild, they can still impact your deer herd and other wildlife. Limited food sources during this time can be particularly challenging as bucks recover from the rut and does enter early pregnancy. This

is where highly-nutritional food plots and supplement feeding play a critical role in the health of your herd or flock. Likewise, turkeys and quail require extra nutrition during this crucial time, as their nesting season is approaching to assist in increasing egg production, which leads to successful poult production. We like to spread or run Milo in feeders this time of year for turkeys and quail.

Supplemental protein feeding for deer has gained popularity, and feeding for turkeys can be beneficial as well, but a high-quality, high-protein, well-maintained food plot is essential. Deer primarily browse on leaves, twigs and succulent new growth (especially after a control burn) rather than native-type grasses, making food plots particularly important during the late winter and early spring if they are properly maintained. Turkeys also utilize clover plots intensively during the spring. We have harvested gobblers during the spring, and their craws would be packed with clover leaves.

Heading into the fall planting season, aim to have food plots ready to plant and fertilize by mid-September, whether they are going to be new plots or established plots where you may no-till additional forage for the fall. We typically try to plant in the area of North Florida and South Georgia in the first week of October, depending on moisture and keeping

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The harder you work, the luckier you become

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a close eye on the weather forecast to plant before a rain or after, which helps ensure a good stand.

A preferred mixture includes forage, oats and wheat, along with a clover and chicory blend – recommending putting at least 15 pounds per acre of a chicory/clover blend. Chicory is a favorite and is high in protein and tends to thrive in lighter or heavier soils, while clovers tend to do better in heavier soils. Chicory is particularly resilient, drought-tolerant and can withstand heavy browsing, making it an excellent perennial choice.

If a property has the plot space, plant a straight clover field at 50 pounds per acre or a chicory field of approximately 20 pounds per acre. The straight clover fields or chicory fields have a high initial cost but can thrive for years with the proper care, so in the long run, they can pay dividends. These fields have the added benefit of being shed magnets because of the amount of time bucks spend on them as they are trying to recover from the rut.

Unfortunately, many people plant food plots in the fall, fertilize them once, and then neglect them for the remainder of the hunting season. We constantly monitor food plots for color (dark green) and new growth to indicate when additional fertilizer is needed.

For new plots, we recommend taking soil samples to check pH levels and determine if lime is needed. Preparing the soil for a smooth seedbed using a rotovator or field cultivator is vital, especially for smaller seeds like clover, chicory and alfalfa, using a cultipacker to assist in firming the seedbed so when the small seeds sprout, they have excellent soil contact with the root system.

You could consider dividing your plots into halves or thirds to plant various perennial varieties, such as maybe straight clover or chicory, leaving out the wheat and oats, or planting annuals, such as Sunn Hemp blended with Lablab, forage-type peas or soybeans, that produce excellent tonnage and peak at various times of the year, ensuring a continuous supply of nutritious forage. We have even no-till planted round-up ready corn and round-up ready forage soybeans in a mixture of five pounds of corn seed per fifty-pound bag of soybeans. This mixture was a little more costly, but was very productive.

Key challenges for food plots in our area include dry weather, heat, humidity, weed control and over-browsing. Regarding over-browsing, this is a reason we like chicory to withstand over-browsing, particularly in drought conditions, due to its substantial taproot.

By February, the oat and wheat

are becoming tough and less palatable to deer. This is the time to spray a grass-specific herbicide on the plot to kill the grasses and release the clover and chicory. For grass control, we like to use Clethodim, which is an active ingredient in several generic grass herbicides. Without the competition from the grasses, the clover in particular really starts to shine at a time that the deer herd needs it the most.

You can also incorporate additional annual crops, such as cowpeas, using a no-till method, and Joint Vetch – *Aeschynomene*, to assist in supplementing chicory during the late spring/summer. But when you receive good rainfall, we recommend fertilizing chicory with a high nitrogen fertilizer to promote lush growth and possibly mowing to the height of six to eight inches

to control unwanted weeds and promote new growth during late summer.

We also like to use split applications of fertilizer at planting and every eight to 12 weeks throughout the growing season to ensure high nutritional value and palatability in the plots, keeping them highly attractive for deer feeding.

These are two guiding principles: the harder you work, the luckier you become; and you reap what you sow. These principles apply to wildlife management as well. Friends and clients who find consistent success are those who work hard and go the extra mile in managing their properties.

Regardless of how you're set up to plant and manage your property, it's a year-round commitment. If you're not dedicating the time, chances are your neighbor is.



Walter Hatchett (left) and Brett Bryan (right), both with Jon Kohler & Associates, are passionate about wildlife management and are happy to discuss it. If you have any questions or would like to discuss wildlife management, you can reach Walter Hatchett at (850) 508-4564 or walter@jonkohler.com, or Brett Bryan at (850) 556-4362 or brett@jonkohler.com. For additional information regarding deer management and research, visit <https://www.msudeer.com>.

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