



FARMSTEAD

Please **DO** Feed *the* Animals

Whether you're a hunter or wildlife watcher, creating a food plot on your land keeps those furry, four-legged and feathered friends coming back for more. BY ALAN CLEMONS

MARLON GULLION DOESN'T SEE HIMSELF AS A WILDLIFE

ARTIST, but his canvas typically is bathed in varying shades of green, tan and brown, and comes with a complement of bugs, snakes and summer's searing heat.

Gullion's canvas isn't found in a studio, and his palette doesn't include oils and brushes. He turns bland patches of weedy fields into supplemental food plots for hunting, which also can be done by anyone who wants to watch and enjoy wildlife year-round on their land.

"I wouldn't call it a science, but a man has to be creative and use the terrain to his advantage," says Gullion, who leases about 13 acres in central Tennessee for deer and turkey hunting. "It is definitely more than just plowing up the ground and planting something."

Time and effort, he says, are needed to plan, build and maintain supplemental food plots, which can yield extra nutrition for a host of wildlife, including deer, turkeys, quail, rabbits, songbirds and more.

"I put a lot of work into it and sometimes question why I do it in the summer heat. But once I get it done," continues Gullion, "smelling the fresh-cut clover or sitting in a stand in winter watching deer and turkeys makes it worthwhile."



For a comprehensive planting guide, including the best plants for your planting zone and the animals you can attract, visit wildlifeseeds.com/info/usazonemap.html.

Ask the Experts

Perhaps 6 weeks before you want to plant, contact a certified wildlife biologist or county Extension service about which plants will grow best in your area. Many Extension service agencies offer information on their websites that will be a good starting point. If you're financially able to do so, hiring a wildlife manager to assist you with planning is an option, too.

The Budget

Establish a budget based on the cost of seed, fertilizer, gas and mechanical equipment. Building and maintaining food plots, especially on large acreages, can easily run into thousands of dollars.

Where To Plant

Gullion looks for portions of fallow agricultural fields overgrown with weeds or small saplings, such as sweet gum, oak or pine. Other good candidates may be little nooks in or near the edges of forests used by deer and turkeys as travel routes to and from bedding and feeding areas, or near a water source.

Gullion also studies the terrain, taking into account factors like drainage and sunlight. For instance, south-facing terrain will receive sunlight in winter and typically fare better for growth than north-facing slopes. Most foraging plants do best where soil drains well. If, however, you're planting in soggy areas, check with a local Extension agent for plants that will thrive under those conditions.

Whether you plan to hunt or just view wildlife, wind should also factor into your decision of where to plant. Most wild animals have a very acute sense of smell, so you'll want to carve out various places from which you'll watch them that, depending on wind direction, will allow you to be downwind.