

Winter food plot fertilization

You can stimulate forage production in annual food plots with mid-winter fertilization. Annual cereal grains (such as winter wheat and oats) and brassicas (such as turnips, radishes, and rapes) may get a boost in growth with an application of about 30 pounds of nitrogen per acre. Nitrogen is relatively short-lived in the soil and the effects of fall nitrogen fertilization on these plots are gone by mid-winter.

Clover and alfalfa plots are able to fix nitrogen through a symbiotic relationship with *Rhizobium* and other bacteria. Also, perennial clovers and alfalfa also are dormant during mid-winter. Therefore, nitrogen fertilization is not recommended for legumes at this time. However, if you have a plot mixed with clovers and small grains (oats, wheat, or cereal rye), an application of 30 pounds of nitrogen per acre may be warranted, especially if the grains look pale or if the plots are receiving a considerable amount of use.

Phosphorus and potassium are longer lived in the soil and their application rate should follow soil test recommendations. If you haven't tested your soil, it's not too late. Visit your county Extension office for a sampling box and instructions. Soil tests are generally available within 2 weeks.

Effects of fertilization are reduced if soil pH is too low (below 5.8). For maximum nutrient availability to food plot forages, soil pH should be maintained between 6.0 and 7.0. The effects of liming are long-lived, usually 3 to 4 years. If you are going to establish a new food plot this spring or fall, go ahead and have a soil sample tested and apply the recommended amount of lime now because it takes 5 to 6 months for the full effect of liming to be realized.

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