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# Management increases chance for trophy bucks

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**Although I am** writing this on one of those blistering Oklahoma summer days we all know and love, by the time this article is circulated, fall will

be just around the corner. If history can serve to predict the future, accompanying fall will be “heightened interest” in deer-related topics – and a commensurate increase in products being marketed to the deer enthusiast. As deer season approaches, the aisles of sporting goods stores and the pages of catalogs overflow with products touted to “attract deer for miles” or “produce that monster buck.” One product even claims its use will “improve deer genetics.” In addition to “management aids,” there are hunting aids on the market that (if the hype is true) will do everything except field dress your deer for you. The modern-day deer enthusiast is inundated with products that they can’t live without.

Many of these products, either by expressed claim or by implication, are being advertised as “cure-alls.” If you have a problem, they have a remedy. I like to call them “silver bullets.” I suppose it is human nature to want to believe silver bullets exist, but, generally, this is not the case.



As an example of a silver bullet, let’s look at the numerous food plot mixtures being marketed at premium prices. Many claim to improve herd health and antler size, but do they really? Persons contemplating using these products need to ask themselves several questions. Is the food

plot being planted to attract or concentrate deer for one reason or another? If so, a food plot may be useful. If, on the other hand, the justification for planting a food plot is to increase carrying capacity and improve herd health, then this requires closer examination. Food plot or supple- ▶

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mental feeding programs that actually accomplish these latter two goals are very intensive and expensive. Land management practices (e.g., proper grazing management and prescribed burning programs) that affect habitat on the landscape scale are most beneficial to deer populations. In most cases, the casual food plotter is going to have minimal effect on carrying capacity and herd health.

Another question of interest is which, if any, of the “high dollar” mixtures is the one for the job? I really do not have an answer for that. If you believe the advertising, they all are.

Will a certain plant or mixture grow in your region and soil type? The real answer is “maybe,” although some of the claims suggest that some products will grow on asphalt in the desert. Will deer eat it? Again, the answer is “maybe.” Is there something you can plant that is less expensive and just as good? The answer is “probably.”

And, finally, after a long history of harvesting small yearling bucks, is planting a “super” food plot mixture going to improve your chances of finally harvesting that “once in a lifetime” trophy buck? Unfortunately, the answer is “probably not.” If mature

bucks are extremely rare in an area, harvest strategy and possibly large-scale habitat quality issues need to be addressed.

I am a skeptic by nature. If I looked hard enough, I could probably trace my roots back to Missouri. I guess that is why I look at many of these products with a raised eyebrow. All too often, deer-related issues are over simplified, and silver bullets are used to address complex issues. Unfortunately, these silver bullets seldom hit their mark.

Remember: If it sounds too good to be true, it usually is. ■