



Whitetail WIZARDRY

Wildlife biologist knows there's no magic formula for attracting deer. It starts with assessing land for food, cover and water.

BY JOHN BUCKNER

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Crop-chomping deer are a bane to most commercial farmers. But landowners who lease their land to hunters or just like seeing deer on their property don't hesitate to throw down the welcome mat. For them, their goal is to create a habitat that attracts and supports the four-legged creatures. That's where Grant Woods comes in...

The wildlife biologist grew up in the Missouri Ozarks hunting and trapping his way toward an education in wildlife management, specifically white-tailed deer research. The renowned deer biologist's consulting work with hunting clubs and city municipalities have him packing his bags for visits all across the US — anyplace you can find whitetails. His property, near Branson, Missouri sits on top of a ridge in the Ozark Mountains. He calls it the "proving grounds" because land that was once abused by fire, poor timber-cutting choices and overgrazing is well on its way to providing excellent wildlife habitat. So much so that his chunk of "bald knobs" now support the equivalent of a whopping 100 deer per square mile.

Woods gets many consulting inquiries not only from hunters who want to improve their hunting prospects, but also from families that just want to see more deer. "Everyone wants to know, 'How many deer do I have on my property?' That's not the way to look at it," he says. Woods explains it's really about **how many deer your property can support** so that they can express their full genetic potential.

"Everyone thinks trees equate to more deer," he says. "A continuous closed canopy forest is starvation alley for a deer." Deer are solitary animals — they don't like looking at each other, so ideally, you would have a checkerboard pattern of food, cover and water." He says this pattern supports reduced home ranges increasing more deer within a given area. Some of his clients want to give their property a manicured parklike appearance. "Sell the mowers, and you will see some wildlife. Deer live and die about 4 feet off the ground, so I want it messy and cluttered up to 4 feet in height," he adds.



Learn more about white-tailed deer and the things you can do to make your land more attractive to wildlife at Woods' video based website: www.growingdeer.tv.

SOYBEAN FORAGE: "If you are a deer farmer, you're a forage farmer," says Dr. Grant Woods. Since the Ozark Mountains are heavily forested, Woods is a big fan of food plots. He **fills in nutrition gaps by planting forage soybeans**. These are indeterminate beans that grow until the frost kills them. Woods says they will provide whitetails high quality, nutritious forage for 10 1/2 months a year when you include the seeds in the pods. "For dollars per pound of meat produced, a forage soybean crop produces the least cost per pound than any other crop I could grow for deer."

"If you're in an agricultural crop area, put in a food plot of forage soybeans," Woods advises. He says that once the neighbor's soybeans have been harvested, you've still got something **green and high in protein that is attractive to deer**. **You've got something he doesn't have, and you will see deer on your property."**

To help does and bucks reach their maximum genetic potential, you need quality forage, preferably year-round. "Buck deer can lose 30% of their body weight after going through the rut and the lack of food through winter," he says. "That's a 200 lb buck losing 60 pounds. That's stressful." Dr. Wood's plants Eagle Seed's fall food plot, Broadside, over the top of the soybeans 45-60 days before the fall frost.