

Wildlife Food Plot Program Fact Sheet

PURPOSE

The purpose of this practice is to establish annual or perennial wildlife food plots that will enhance wildlife and wildlife habitat.



Photo: Don Poggensee/USDA NRCS

A food plot is an annual or perennial planting of grain, legumes, and forbs (wildflowers and some "weeds" such as knotweed, lambsquarters, and dandelions). Deer, rabbit, quail, pheasant, and a variety of other wildlife found on rural land can benefit from food plots.

A food plot offers wildlife a place to forage for food in late fall, winter and early spring after field crops are harvested. It is left standing over winter to encourage wildlife use. Where fall plowing buries the majority of crop residue, food plots are an excellent choice to encourage wildlife survival. When incorporated with Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) practices such as CP1 and CP2, it compliments the grass cover already present.

Food plots *alone* are not good habitat cover. Landowners should strive to provide permanent wildlife habitat for the target species. See NRCS Field Office Technical Guide (FOTG) Standard 645: *Upland Wildlife Habitat Management* for further guidance.

WHERE PRACTICE APPLIES

On fields that meet eligibility requirements for the Conservation Reserve Program as determined by the Farm Service Agency (FSA).

CRP POLICY

Wildlife Food Plot CP12 may only be used in conjunction with CP1, CP2, CP3, CP3A, CP4D, CP10, CP11 and CP32. Cost-share is not authorized for this practice.

Individual food plots shall not:

- Exceed 10 percent of a field
- Exceed five (5) acres per field
- Exceed five (5) acres in size
- Be immediately adjacent to one another.

PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS

- Consider making food plots at least 50 feet wide, with a minimum size of $\frac{1}{4}$ acre. If it is expected that deer will be feeding heavily in the food plot, plant in squares and increase the size to 2-5 acres.
- Food plots planted on the contour are recommended.
- Consider leaving un-harvested grain strips along field edges, adjacent to other cover types.
- Locate food plots within $\frac{1}{4}$ mile of quality winter cover such as woodland, sagebrush steppe, riparian areas, and wetlands.
- To minimize snow accumulation, food plots should be located on the south and east side of permanent winter cover.
- Where permanent cover is not available, consider including a snow-catch area in the plan design. See attached *Examples of Annual Food Plot Designs*.
- Consider requesting technical assistance from an NRCS, or Idaho Dept. of Fish and Game Biologist.

SPECIFICATIONS

Site-specific requirements will be listed on ID-CPA-25, Seeding/Planting Plan Specification. Specifications are prepared in accordance with the FOTG Standard 645-*Upland Wildlife Habitat Management*. Food plots must be separated by a sufficient distance to maximize wildlife benefits and access ability.

- Plantings will occur early enough to allow establishment before frost. Spring plantings will occur as early as the soil can be worked.
- Annual food plots will be rotated every year. Plant only 1/3 of the food plot each year. Allow the natural succession of forbs to occur on the remaining 2/3 of the food plot.
- Food plots will be located on the least erosive areas of the field. Adequate vegetative cover must be developed and maintained to provide both wildlife and erosion control benefits.
- Annual food plots will be left standing throughout the winter and spring until replanted.
- Annual and Perennial food plot species will be chosen from the appropriate tables below.

| ANNUAL Food Type | Seeding Rate (PLS lbs./acre) | Seeding Depth (inches) |
|----------------------|------------------------------|------------------------|
| Buckwheat | 25 | 1 - 2 |
| Corn | 15 | 1 - 2 |
| Cowpeas | 60 | ½ - 1 |
| Millet | 8 | ½ - 1 |
| Grain Sorghum (Milo) | 12 | 1 - 2 |
| Oats | 30 | 1 |
| Peas | 60 | 1 - 2 |
| Rape/Canola | 4 | ¼ - ½ |
| Sunflowers | 4 | 1 - 2 |
| Wheat | 40 | 1 - 2 |

| PERENNIAL Food Type | Seeding Rate (PLS lbs./ac.) | Seeding Depth (inches) |
|---------------------|-----------------------------|------------------------|
| Alfalfa | 5 | ¼ - ½ |
| Alsike Clover | 2 | ¼ - ½ |
| Red Clover | 5 | ¼ - ½ |
| Sainfoin | 29 | ¼ - ½ |
| Small Burnet | 13 | ¼ - ½ |

Example food plot sizes

| Acres | Length | Width | Ft. ² |
|-------|--------|-------|------------------|
| ¼ | 363 | 30 | 10,890 |
| ½ | 363 | 60 | 21,780 |
| 1 | 545 | 80 | 43,560 |
| 3 | 1,307 | 100 | 130,680 |
| 5 | 1,089 | 200 | 217,800 |

RECOMMENDED SUITABILITY

Annual Food Plots

- Primarily target upland game birds.
- Mainly function to establish safe winter foraging areas that restrict unnecessary movement and to provide a dependable winter food source to carry game through the winter.

Perennial Food Plots

- Primarily target deer, elk, quail, turkey, pheasant, sharp-tailed grouse, sage-grouse, rabbits, and songbirds.
- Mainly function to establish safe winter foraging areas that restrict unnecessary movement and to provide a dependable winter food source to carry game through the winter and habitat connectivity in human-altered landscapes.

FERTILIZER CONSIDERATIONS

Annual Food Plots

- To determine the need for commercial fertilizer, a soil test from the current planting year or during the previous two years is recommended.
- All nutrients shall be applied according to the Nutrient Management (590) standard.

Perennial Food Plots

- Under normal circumstances, the recommended perennial species do not need to be fertilized.
- Before seeding, inoculate the legume seed with the appropriate inoculant for the species. Pre-inoculated seed may be used, but shall be re-inoculated if used beyond dates specified on the inoculant tag.

OPERATION AND MAINTENANCE

1. General weed control is not required as the presence of some forbs (knotweed, lambsquarters, and dandelions) actually benefit wildlife by providing higher protein and greater number of seeds than domestic grains.
2. Protect the acres from unplanned haying and grazing. Fences may need to be constructed and maintained to exclude livestock.
3. Noxious weeds, such as musk thistle, Russian knapweed, and Dyer's woad, must be controlled in accordance with state and local noxious weed laws. Additional

information can be found in the 2008 Idaho's Noxious Weed guide:

[\[www.idahoweedawareness.net\]](http://www.idahoweedawareness.net)

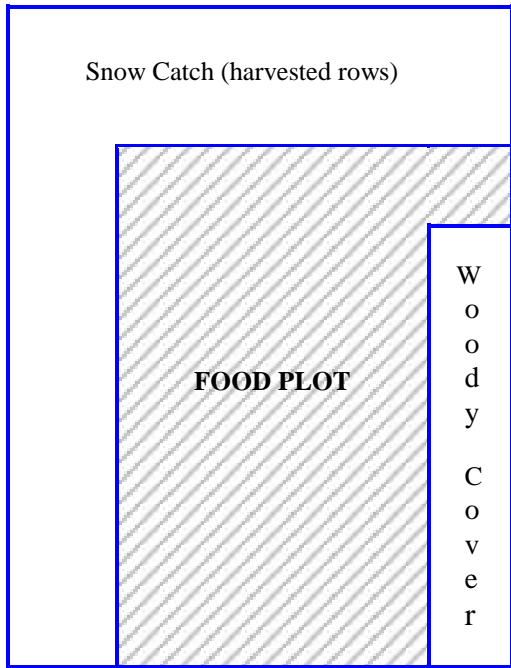
or visit the Idaho State Department of Agriculture's website:

<http://www.agri.state.id.us/Categories/Plants/nsects/NoxiousWeeds/indexnoxweedmain.php>

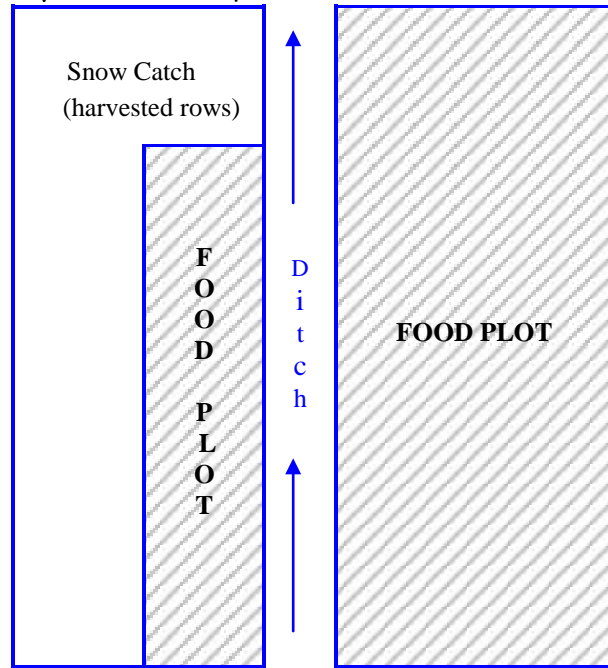
4. All herbicide label requirements and applicable state and federal regulations will be followed.
5. Spraying or other control of invasive species and noxious plants will be done on a "spot" basis to protect forbs and legumes that benefit native pollinators and other wildlife.
6. On perennial food plots, management practices and activities will not disturb cover during the primary nesting period for grassland species of **April 1 through August 1**. Mowing, however, may be needed during the plant establishment period to control weeds.
7. Perennial food plots generally will not persist beyond 5-6 years. Manage perennial vegetation every 3-5 years after adequate vegetative establishment. Management may include one or more of the following options: (1) mowing with residue removed or spread evenly across the field, (2) light disking, or (3) re-establishment. Management activities, which substantially disturb the vegetative cover, should take place prior to April 1, or after August 1.

EXAMPLES OF ANNUAL FOOD PLOT DESIGNS

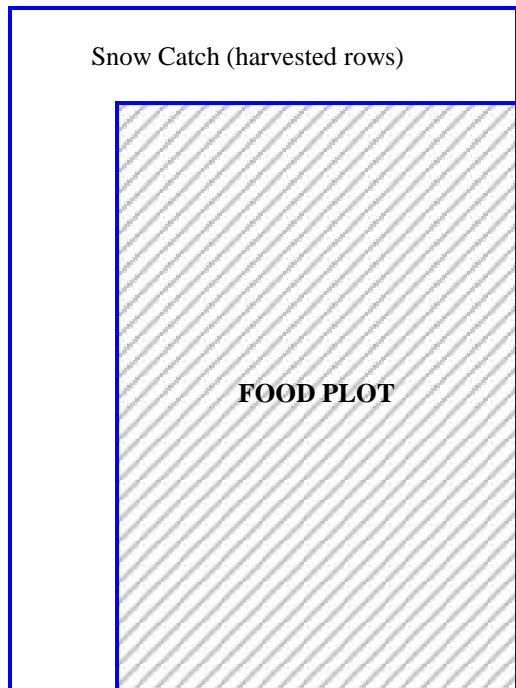
(The diagrams are designed to provide prevailing wind protection; the top of each diagram faces North.)



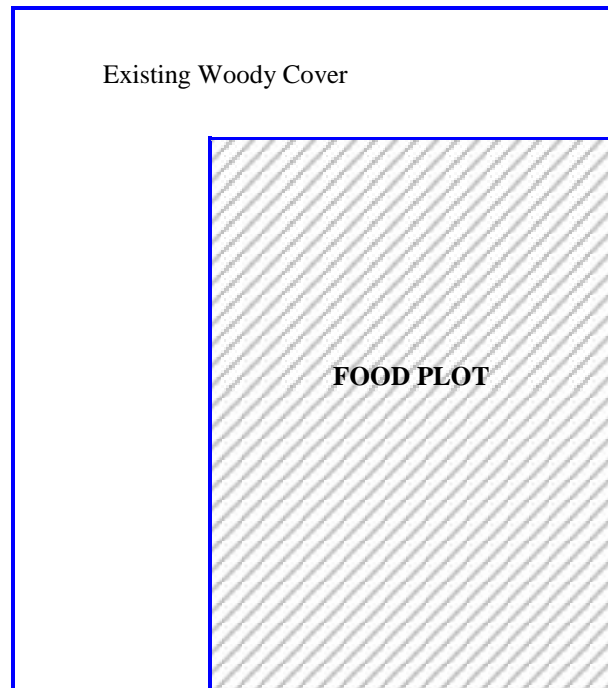
A. Food plot designed to protect existing winter (woody) cover.



B. Food plots designed to enhance ditch, or stream.



C. Food plot designed to function alone.



D. Food plot designed to utilize existing woody cover as protection from prevailing winds.