



# The Food Plot Doctor

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## Food Plots After the Snow Falls

**I**t is obvious that many members of Whitetails Unlimited live in the "snow belt." Here is a sample of one of the most asked questions we have received:

*"I have 30 acres in central Wisconsin. I have three small food plots on this land. The deer hit the food plots early and often during early bow season. I can't complain about the success I've had, but I love hunting late season. Is there anything that I can plant in one of my food plots that will actually attract deer after the first snowfall?"*

— Jerry K., Wisconsin

I took this popular question to three experts: Todd Amenrud with BioLogic, John Carpenter with Pennington Seed Company, and Steve Scott with Whitetail Institute. Below are their responses.

**Todd Amenrud, BioLogic:** "Here in the north, as I'm sure you are aware, nothing continues to grow once we get freezing temperatures. Our options are limited for whitetail food sources once we get snow cover. It has to either be a plant that grows tall enough so that it sticks up above the snow, or something that deer can dig up through the snow to retrieve relatively easily. Because certain areas receive very deep snow depths and because certain conditions can cause the snow to form a crust, the plants that whitetails typically dig for are not reliable food sources. Although there are plants like matured soybeans or sorghum that could fit the bill, basically Brassicas and corn are the two most reliable food sources we have for late fall or wintertime snow cover.

"Both are great for attraction and nutrition. Although corn is poor in crude protein (around 8%), it is high in carbohydrates and fat, and it has a TDN (total digestible nutrients) value of over 80%. It is especially useful as a fall and winter energy source.

"Brassicas are probably the single best whitetail food that I'm aware of. They provide unbelievable yield (8 to 15 tons per acre for late summer/fall plantings, and 18 to over 30 tons per acre for spring plantings); exceptional protein content (our Brassicas

average 36% crude protein); a TDN rate of over 80%; and once the cold temperatures cause the high levels of starches in the plant to convert to sugar, it is without a doubt the best late-season attractant I've ever seen.

"We have corn included in BioMaxx. BioMaxx is a blend of two varieties of Round-Up Ready corn blended with three varieties of Round-Up Ready soybeans.

"We have Brassicas included in a number of blends. Maximum is a blend of our five best Brassicas. We also have Brassicas included with other plant species in Full Draw, Green Patch Plus, and Premium Perennial. In addition, we have Brassicas available for consumers to add to other plantings in our Brassica Plot Performance Additive."

**John Carpenter, Pennington Seed Company:** "I have a few thoughts on this:

- 1.) The best plant for taking the winter cold, holding up its forage quality in the cold, and giving deer enough forage to DIG OUT of the snow cover is Brassicas.
- 2.) We use Brassicas by themselves, and in a Brassica blend we call Deer Greens.
- 3.) We also sell Brassica as a part of many different deer products, such as Rackmaster Elite, Rackmaster Refuge, Buckmaster Feeding Frenzy, and others.
- 4.) The thing I try to remember with food plots is that folks do have some specific problems or goals they need met. However, we cannot lose sight of the big picture. Deer need to



*Brassicas, such as this BioLogic Maximum, serve as a deer attractant during periods of deep snow. This food plot offers an abundance of high quality food. Photo credit: Charlie Alsheimer*

eat every day, and that includes these tough times of the year (winter stress period). Oftentimes folks will try to just grow that one thing that meets their need and that may result in the rest of the year being an empty plate for the deer to eat off of. In the case of Brassicas this is the problem. It is great for the specific reason you have asked for, but it is a poor choice for the rest of the year (almost 280 days). My point is – don't just plant Brassicas that will fill that void – use a mixture like Rackmaster Elite that contains Brassicas but that also contains clover, small grains, winter peas, and chicory so you are more likely to get YEAR ROUND food supplies."





*The first year the author planted Brassicas, the deer ignored the crop, as shown. They discovered the new food the second season and ate it to the ground.*

**Steve Scott, Whitetail Institute:** "Brassicas are ideal for deep snow. Brassicas by nature actually sweeten with a hard frost. To be precise, the first hard frost triggers plant maturity, which in turn results in a sweeter taste. It's like a banana. When it's still green, a banana is not very tasty. Once mature or ripe however, a yellow banana is very tasty. The Brassicas in our Winter-Greens are palatable to deer right away, and they get even tastier after a hard frost and snow fall. So, while other food plots are becoming less appealing, or are getting eaten down, Winter-Greens are getting better. And don't think the deer don't know it!"



*Above: In the "snow belt," periods of deep snow put deer into a dangerous stress due to the lack of nutritious food. It is here that Brassicas excel in attracting deer and providing them with a healthy food source. Right: Brassicas, such as this planting of Imperial Winter-Greens, provide a lot of nutritious food under the snow. The first frost causes the leaves to become very palatable to deer.*



Based on the information from these three experts, it is obvious that Brassica is the answer to the question, "What should I plant so that deer can dig it from under snow and eat?" Now let's look at Brassicas and how to plant them.

### **What is Brassica?**

If you are new to the plant world, you probably find yourself asking what a Brassica is. Brassica is the scientific name for a group of green, leafy plants where cold weather causes the sugar content of the leaf to rise, making the plant higher in protein and highly digestible. During a period when there is little else of quality forage available to deer, they will dig through the snow and feed on these plants. They include turnips, rape, Swedes, canola, mustard, and kale. As a side note, often when deer discover a turnip tuber, they will dig it up and eat it, so this Brassica has value beyond the leaves.

### **Crop Rotation a Must**

Before rushing out and putting all your food plots in Brassicas, do as John Carpenter suggested: plan your food plot crops to offer the deer food on a year-round basis. Also, know that in areas where you plant Brassicas this year and next, you cannot plant them the third year. Due to diseases and insects, Brassicas must be rotated every two years and then kept off the food plot for at least two years. So if you plant every food plot on your property in Brassicas the next two years, the third year you will have no place to move the crop to, and thus the advantage of growing Brassicas will be lost. So you need a long term plan for planting Brassicas, with plans to rotate the crop every two years to totally different food plots. Fail to rotate and you will most likely face the disappointment of watching a new crop turn brown and die.