

MANAGING FOR TROPHY BUCKS

Nobody talks about the little deer they got.

Hunters dream of the big buck that they saw the year before and spend hundreds of dollars on gear and a multitude of hours planning how they will bag that deer in the coming season.

Big antlers however, depend on a variety of factors which are genetics, age, and nutrition. A buck reaches its maximum antler size at around 6 years of age. With proper nutrition a yearling buck's rack can **nearly double in size** with an additional year of growth.

PROPER NUTRITION IS KEY

Good nutrition is key to growing big, healthy deer. Scientists in Texas have shown that adult deer need a diet that is about 16% crude

protein to reach maximum size. Young bucks need a diet of closer to 20% crude protein as their first year diet greatly determines body structure and size. Good nutrition in the early years lays the foundation for the trophy bucks in later years. Raising a trophy buck requires planning and thought years in advance.

YEAR-ROUND FOCUS REQUIRED

While many hunters only think of food plots as a means to draw deer in, savvy hunters know that year-round nutrition is key in getting the big buck!

Antlers begin to grow in April and May so it is important that deer be offered a nutritious diet prior to that time frame so that they have good body condition prior to antler development. A deer lacking in nutrition will feature a stunted rack as it lacks the protein to develop antlers that it is genetically capable of producing. It takes time to improve a deer's body condition just like it takes time and good nutrition for humans to get in shape.



Antler size increases significantly each year, reaching their maximum Boone & Crockett score at about 6 years of age. Protecting young bucks is the most effective single method to improve antler size in most deer management situations.



Annual Antler Cycle

A growing antler is covered in velvet and grows from the tip. Antler growth is slow during April-May, and becomes more rapid during June-July, especially in older bucks.

During the period of rapid growth in June and July, beam length can increase by as much as 2 inches per week for older bucks. As antlers approach their definitive shape, the outermost spongy bone is mineralized into compact bone, while the antler center develops into coarse, narrow spaces.

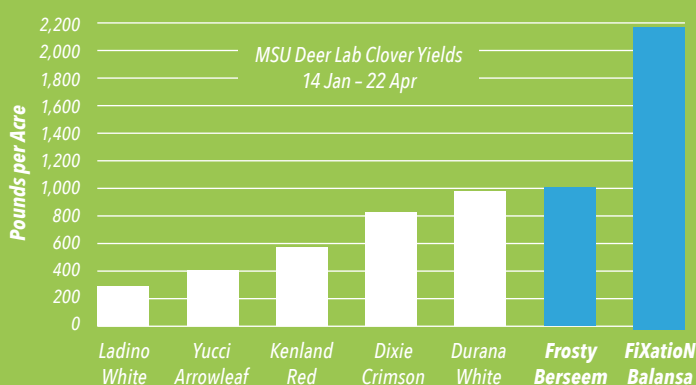
During September antler mineralization is completed, the blood supply is shut off, and the dried velvet is shed. Velvet shedding is usually completed within 24 hours.

Antlers are shed during late-February through March in Mississippi. New antler growth resumes about 3 weeks after antler drop, on a scab that has formed over the pedicles.

CLOVER IS THE ANSWER

FIXatioN BALANSA CLOVER

FIXatioN Balansa Clover is the most versatile clover for food plots. Tolerant to low pH soils, partial shade, and flooding, FIXatioN ticks all the boxes for food plot usage. Crude protein will range from 22% to over 27% throughout the growing season, providing deer with the nutrients that they need to improve body condition and grow imposing racks.



FROSTY BERSEEM CLOVER

FROSTY emerges quickly from the ground making it ideal for hunters looking for a clover to hunt over. With adequate moisture, Frosty will be drawing in deer as quick as 45 days after planting. In recent trials at Mississippi State University, Frosty and FIXatioN placed #1 and #2 for drawing in deer. Frosty puts out plenty of forage early in the season and keeps on growing well into summer. With crude protein levels exceeding 20%, Frosty is perfect for growing big, healthy deer.



We would like to thank Dr. Bronson Strickland of Mississippi State University for all of the knowledge that he has shared. Follow MSU Deer Lab on Facebook to learn more.