

## **Soil test now (fall) for spring wildlife plantings**

Fall is not too early to be thinking about spring planting. Getting soil samples tested in the fall and applying amendments as necessary will pay dividends come spring.

Most sites need liming to adjust soil pH. However, the full effect of liming generally takes 5 – 6 months. Therefore, if you plan to plant food plots in the spring, you should apply lime as recommended in the fall if possible.

Most food plot plantings do best when the pH is 6.0 – 7.0. Nutrients are most available to plants within this range, and bacterial activity is high, which is important for rapid decomposition of organic matter and nutrient cycling, and to increase nitrogen fixation for legumes.

Lime applications are most effective when incorporated into the soil, especially when liming relatively acid soil that has not received lime in many years. Incorporation ensures adjustment through a greater portion of the root zone. However, surface applications without incorporation work well also, and the benefits of no-till planting outweigh any slight benefit of incorporating lime.

Nitrogen is relatively short-lived in the soil. Cool-season forage plots containing oats, wheat, and cereal rye will get a boost from a mid-winter application of nitrogen (about 30 pounds per acre), especially when applied during a period when temperatures are relatively mild. Phosphorus and potassium are more stable and remain in the soil longer. Application of P and K should be made in fall or spring according to soil test recommendations.

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