



# Habitat Success

Key factors influencing seeding success

## FACTORS INFLUENCING SUCCESS

There are a number of factors that influence the success of a habitat seeding project, whether its food plots or native nesting cover. Below are some of the most important so you can focus your attention. We offer a wide variety of resources at [www.PFHabitatStore.com/resources/](http://www.PFHabitatStore.com/resources/) as guides to help you give your habitat project the highest opportunity for success. If you run into questions, you can call our team of wildlife professionals at 866-914-7373.

## SEED QUALITY

At Pheasants Forever, we are committed to providing quality seed for habitat projects. All of our seed is regularly tested (6-9 months) for germination by independent laboratories. We sell our native seed based on Pure Live Seed (PLS). Seed is also tagged and germination results are provided in PLS sheets with orders. This ensures that the seed you receive will grow if seeded correctly.

## SITE PREPARATION

Site preparation is critical to the success of seeding projects for food plots and conservation seedings alike. It may require additional work when converting a project site from a prior non-ag (pasture) use. Proper site prep should result in a field that is free from weeds and excess residue (more than 60% bare dirt), and of the optimal firmness (in many cases you should barely see a boot print in the soil). The ideal site for most conservation plantings should resemble a harvested no-till soybean field.

## PLANTING DEPTH

There are a number of seeding methods (ie, no-till drill, broadcasting, etc) that work with habitat seedings, but if the seed is planted too deep – it will not be successful. Native seed and many small seeded food plot varieties (clovers, brassicas) should be planted in the top 1/8" of soil (typically 30% of the seed should remain on top of the soil). A soft seed bed prior to seeding often results in seed being buried and unable to reach the surface. Conventional planters also often cause seed depth to be an issue in small seeds.

ORDER ONLINE AT: [www.PFHabitatStore.com](http://www.PFHabitatStore.com)

or call – 866-914-7373

## TIMING AND TEMPERATURE

Native perennial seedings have flexible seeding windows. Success can be had with dormant seedings (Nov – Freeze), frost seedings (late winter) and traditional spring seedings (Apr-May). However, seed planted in early summer are at risk of failure due to inadequate precipitation and those planted late summer may germinate only to freeze and die. Many annual seedings (grain food plots) are more sensitive to seeding dates. A minimum number of days are required for the plant to mature. However, planting these too early may lead to seed that rots in the ground waiting for the appropriate temperature (ie sorghum requires at least 65 degree soil temperatures to germinate).

## SOIL NUTRIENTS

Native seed too is more tolerant of soil pH and nutrients when compared to annual food plot species that have strict requirements for pH, nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium (as well as micronutrients). We recommend a soil test whenever planting a food plot and following the recommended soil amendments from the results. Typically, soil tests are not necessary for native plantings and we don't recommend fertilizer as it will generally increase annual weed competition.

## PRECIPITATION / SOIL MOISTURE

In addition to nutrient availability in the soil, plants need water for growth. Seeding should be timed in windows where optimal moisture is likely. Recognize in some cases, mother-nature doesn't provide what is expected or when its most needed.

## WEED CONTROL

Weeds can be an issue, but typically only after seedling emergence (assuming proper site prep). Know that weeds aren't coming from your seed mix, they are in the soil (some seeds remain viable for decades). Herbicides may be a useful tool especially in food plots and some native mixes (plateau/milestone tolerant) but always follow the label instructions for use.

Mowing has been used during the first year on many native plantings. Mowing is rarely required for a successful stand, unless the weeds are very thick, robbing seedlings of moisture and nutrients and shading them from sunlight. If mowing is recommended; 1) mowing height should be above any developing seedlings (at least 12"), mowing frequency should prevent thatch smothering seedlings. Generally this leads to a mowing around July 1 and Aug 1 (mowing height should be higher – 16" +).

## PARTING THOUGHTS

There aren't any guarantees in habitat establishment; but if you start with a good, firm, weed-free seed bed and make sure you use the right equipment and plant it at the right time, you'll have the highest probability for success. Good Luck and Think Habitat!

