



DEER NUTRITION NOTES

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Beware the Pitfalls of Summer Nutrition

Summer is a magical time filled with baseball, picnics, and weekends at the lake and fireworks on the 4th of July. It's a time for watermelon, corn on the cob and the great American pastimes of barbecue grilling and sprinkler dancing. Most folks are eager to see summer come and unhappy to see it go. If it weren't for the hunting season after summer, I would also dread the end of warm, sunny months.

For the whitetail deer, summer is also a time of plenty. Fawns have been born and are busy keeping up with their mothers. Bucks are hanging out in bachelor groups, displaying the ever-growing structure of their velvet antlers. Food is normally ample, and the woods and forests have grown thick and green, providing large amounts of cover.

There is another side of summer, however, that is often overlooked. Late summer can often be as stressful as late winter if rainfall is deficient, especially if it's coupled with deer overpopulation. Ticks, worms and other parasites are plentiful, sapping valuable nutrients and energy from deer. In this article, I will examine the intricacies of summer deer nutrition and provide valuable management tips for providing your deer the best summer nutrition.

SUMMER

Much like spring, summer must be divided into two distinct times: early and late. The early summer months are a time of plenty. The combination of temperature and moisture (in a typical year) provides a bounty of food options. Browse is at its peak, with tons of new leafy growth. Further, soft-mast-producing species, such as raspberry and wild cherry, give deer consumptive opportunities everywhere. Food plots are in full production, with high levels of nutrients and the fastest growth rates of the year. The second phase of summer is not quite as abundant. Mid- to late summer is often drier and with higher temperatures, slowing much of the vegetation growth. As temperatures increase and moisture decreases, vegetation goes into a protective mode, slowing growth and, in worst-case scenarios, going semi-dormant. Most of the readily available browse is gone, and deer begin to focus on the most heat- and drought-resistant forage they can find. Summer is also a time for parasites. Hundreds of ticks invade the coat of deer and insert themselves into the skin, sucking blood and robbing the deer of much-needed nutrients. Blood transportation is vital for antler growth and lactation, as blood is the vehicle that transports nutrients to velvet antlers and mammary glands. Internal parasites also take their toll on deer health. Worms that have entered the system during spring are maturing and eating the nutrients intended for

deer. Further, many diseases become apparent during summers, such as bluetongue and epizootic hemorrhagic disease.

NUTRITIONAL NEEDS

Doe nutrition in summer revolves around lactation. In many cases, does are nursing twins or possibly triplets, which causes a tremendous nutritional strain on the doe. In June and July, does are supplying nearly all the food for fawns, as a fawn's ruminant stomach structure does not develop until at least three months after birth. Until then, the esophageal groove bypasses milk and other food consumed past the undeveloped rumen and to the abomasum. During that time, does require high levels of energy, protein and minerals. Doe milk is very nutrient-dense, demanding a nutrient-dense diet. Protein requirements are as high as 18 percent during this time. Bucks are also at the peak of production, as their antlers are putting on as much as a half-inch or more per day. This antler growth requires extremely high levels of minerals, vitamins, energy and digestible protein. The protein requirement for bucks during this time is a minimum of 16 percent. Bucks are not only growing antlers but also building their body condition in preparation for the rigors of rut. To build body condition, bucks need high levels of energy, which is supplied by production of volatile fatty acids, such as propionic and butyric acid. VFA production comes mostly from

microbial fermentation in the rumen, meaning bucks need access to high-quality forages.

NUTRITIONAL MANAGEMENT FOR SUMMER

Because of the variances of early and late summer, your food plot program must take into account the aspects of both periods of summer. First, high-protein, highly digestible perennials such as Imperial Whitetail Clover, Chicory PLUS, Alfa-Rack Plus, Double-Cross or Extreme are needed to supply a consistent nutrient source throughout summer. In preparation for hotter and drier times, you can include a drought-resistant high-producing annual to your food plot program. Imperial PowerPlant is a blend of specifically selected lab-lab, forage peas, soybeans and structural plants, including sunflowers and sorghum. PowerPlant is incredibly drought resistant and produces enormous amounts of forage — even during later summer months. Mineral and vitamin supplementation is vital during summer because does and bucks require the highest level of those nutrients during this period. Imperial 30-06, 30-06 Plus Protein and Cutting Edge Optimize are excellent products, each containing vital mineral and vitamins, formulated in precise amounts from the highest-quality ingredients. Which you use depends on the preference of your deer. Each are attractive to deer but use different types of attractants. Try a sample of each, and let the deer tell you which is best in your situation. 🦌



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