

“YOUNG GUNS AND BIG BUCKS ON SMALL PLOTS”

by

Blaine Burley

It probably won't be considered shocking news to learn that many of today's small landowners have discovered that big bucks can be grown and harvested on small acreage. What is still being debated, however, is the best way to achieve this lofty goal, and what opportunities it opens up (especially for young hunters). In the past, we were taught that you needed large tracts of land (over 5,000 acres of contiguous land) or high-fenced operations to effectively and consistently produce quality whitetails. However, many of today's wildlife managers and biologists have realized that you can consistently produce trophy-class bucks on small tracts of land if you manage these tracts properly. The cornerstone of managing small tracts effectively is to provide everything your deer herd needs within the boundaries of your property. The basics may be obvious: adequate amounts of food, water, and cover. Yet, most small tracts of land lack one or more of these three components. You, as a wildlife manager and landowner, must provide these three key ingredients in order to attract, grow, and keep quality bucks on your property.

One of the key ingredients in producing (and harvesting) BIG BUCKS on small tracts of land is planting small, year-round food plots. Well-planned, strategically located food plots will provide a high quality food source for deer all year long. They can also serve as an effective means of concentrating and holding deer on your hunting property. Therefore, your deer will have to travel less to feed which lowers their chances of being harvested by your neighbors. “Holding” deer with good food, water and cover also increases your chances of “managing” to produce a good population of older-age class bucks on your property.

Small food plots should not be confused with planting a few “easy” food plots each fall. First of all, you will need to plant lots of small year-round plots in order to provide a sufficient amount of quality forage to attract, grow, and hold these older-age class bucks on your property. Next, you will face the challenge of getting to more remote areas to plant them. Traditionally, food plots have been planted in areas that are easily accessible to tractors and large equipment. Smaller plots will require an ATV and preferably, a do-it-all planting implement that will allow you to plant the entire plot using a single machine. I prefer to use a 3-foot PLOTMASTER™ unit to plant my small plots. Due to its compact design and ability to do everything from disc, plow, plant and cultipack the soil, it is ideal for planting food plots in rough, hard-to-get-to places. With this set-up, you can successfully plant food plots virtually anywhere on your property including firebreaks, small openings in planted pines, cut-overs, swamps and wooded areas. These remote, isolated areas are where mature bucks spend the majority of their time! Providing an attractive, year-round food source near a known bedding area in these remote areas is the KEY to harvesting mature bucks consistently and can only be accomplished with a set-up similar to the one described above.

By locating food plots near established bedding areas, deer do not have to travel as far to feed. Mature bucks tend to feel more secure and travel more often, especially during daylight hours, in these isolated places. As a result, hunting in these areas provides a better chance of harvesting trophy class

bucks during legal shooting hours. In a nutshell, you take the “food” to the deer using your ATV and a multi-use implement such as the PLOTMASTER™.



Blaize Burley (age 10) poses with a BIG 235lb 8-point buck taken on small ½ acre plot in Middle GA.

Now, here is one of the best reasons of all to plant small plots: I have found that it is much easier for young and/or inexperienced hunters to harvest deer (especially mature bucks) on small food plots. Most of us realize that trying to make a good shot on a rut-crazed buck chasing a doe in the middle of a 40-acre soybean field can be a daunting task even for the most seasoned hunters. Young and/or inexperienced hunters in the grip of an adrenalin rush and “buck fever” have little chances of harvesting a mature buck in this situation. Small food plots can help solve this problem by providing relatively short yardage shots at calm, standing deer. My son and daughter both harvested their first deer on small ½-acre plots. Both deer were taken within 75 yards and both were standing still and feeding in these small, isolated plots.

Whenever you are hunting with youngsters, it's best to choose some type of enclosed stand or box blind if you can. Kids are full of energy and deer hunting can get old quick (usually about ten minutes after you arrive)! It helps to pack a favorite game, iPod or book to help pass the time. Anything that helps keep movement to a minimum dramatically increases your chances at harvesting a mature buck. Perhaps most important, enclosed stands keep you and your kids out of the weather and will make their outdoor experience much more pleasurable.

Spend some quality time in the great outdoors with a youngster whenever you get the chance. Perhaps it's one of your children, your grandchildren, niece, or nephew. Whatever the circumstances, small tracts, small plots and small children seem to go hand-in-hand and if you ask me...that makes all the work worthwhile. Protect the future of our great sport and take a kid hunting the next time you go to the woods!



Brock Burley (age 8) admires his WIDE 10-point buck harvested in a small plot in Alabama.

About the Author: Blaine Burley, President of Woods-N-Waters, Inc., Plotmaster Systems, Ltd and Inventor of the PLOTMASTER™, have been growing and harvesting BIG BUCKS on small plots and small tracts of land for over two decades now. In November 2007, while filming for “The Bucks of Tecomate” TV Show for VERSUS, Burley harvested one of his largest bucks ever on a small 80-acre hunting tract in Central Illinois (see photo). Plotmaster Systems, Ltd currently distributes a complete line of PLOTMASTER™ products through Independent Territory Distributors. For more information on the PLOTMASTER™, call 888-MAX-GAME or visit the www.plotmasters.com.