

## Food plots lure wildlife, improve hunting

BY DON DEL ROSSO Times-Democrat Staff Writer

Epiphany might be too strong a word.

But Jack Hazel said "a light bulb went on" last fall when it occurred to him that he could derive more than "fun" from designing and building food plots to attract wildlife for hunting.

Maybe he could turn pleasure into profit.

"There's a huge business that been created in this food plot phenomenon," said the owner of Angler Development LLC of Warrenton, which got county approval a few years ago for a Costco warehouse store near New Baltimore that never got built.

"And there's nobody to tell to tell you what to plant, or has the equipment," he said.

Hazel hopes his company, Virginia Monster Plots, can capitalize on that market void.

So far as he can tell, no other company like it exists.

Hazel set up a company website ([virginiamonsterplots.com](http://virginiamonsterplots.com)) and has done limited advertising.

He admits business has been slow so far.

"I do it because I enjoy it," said Hazel, who began planting food plots at Huntley, the family farm near Broad Run, where he, family and friends primarily hunt deer and dove. "I'm a hunter. Have been all my life."

He's worked with four clients, either advising them about or building food plots.

Virginia Monster Plots' website has recorded more than 300 visits, Hazel said.

He hopes that hits will translate into paying customers.

"I've talked to people who haven't committed," said Hazel, who received a bachelor's degree in forestry from Sewanee (Tenn.), The University of the South in 1979. "What I'm trying to do is tap into the hunting community, or landowners who just want to attract deer or birds" to view more closely.

There's more to planting food plots than meets the eye, he said, referring to the unschooled who buy expensive commercial seed mixes, but in the end have little to show for their investment.

A 50-pound bag of seed mix, which would cover about a half acre, costs \$50 to \$60, Hazel said.

Most often, novices misapply the seed, choose a poor site or fail to properly maintain the plot, he said.

Hazel charges a \$50 per hour consulting fee.

He put labor and equipment costs at \$400 to \$500 per acre.

His services include a visit and advice about the appropriate site for a plot and the variety and mix of seed needed to attract the desired kind of wildlife.

Topography, existing vegetation, soil quality, sun exposure, streams and other on-site natural features also figure into plot location, Hazel said.

He can design and build plots, or refer clients to contractors to do the work.

"It's basic farming practices," Hazel said.

Buckwheat and sunflowers prove especially effective in drawing dove, song birds and butterflies and a chicory/clover combination appeals to deer and turkey.

Jeff Hadlock of Centreville, a long-time friend of Hazel's, recently bought 58 acres adjacent to Huntley.

In June, Hazel advised Hadlock and helped him plant buckwheat and sunflower.

"What I really wanted was a dove field," said Hadlock, a commercial builder and real estate developer.

Despite dry conditions and a late planting start because of real estate closing complications, the plot's thriving, he said.

"It absolutely works," Hadlock, 48, said of the concept. "I've been [hunting] all my life. I've had the pleasure of hunting over some great

fields. Jack knows how to plant those.”

Dove season begins in early September.

His plot should be ready for hunting by the middle of the month, said Hazel, son of noted Northern Virginia developer and zoning lawyer John T. “Til” Hazel.

For the first part of dove season, Hadlock will hunt Hazel’s land.

In September, Hazel will help him plant a second food plot of oats, turnips and winter wheat to attract deer, Hadlock said.

For decades, the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries has used food plots as a “holistic” way of managing a variety of wildlife, department biologist Mike Dye said.

Virginia owns the 4,500-acre Chester F. Phelps Wildlife Management Area along the Rappahannock River near Remington and the 4,000-acre G. Richard Thompson Wildlife Management Area near Delaplane.

The state makes extensive use of food plots for deer at the Phelps management area, where it allows and encourages deer hunting.

About 25 percent of Phelps comprises grassland and shrubs, Dye said.



Times-Democrat Staff Photo/Randy Litzinger FOOD FOR GAME: Jack Hazel, shown here on his property in The Plains, plants sunflowers to attract deer for hunting season.

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