

# WILDLIFE TRENDS

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## Mast Trees

### Part I in a Series: The Permanent Food Plot

by Wayne Bassett and Wallace Whatley

If you plant for wildlife every spring and fall and maintain a property with that in mind, you know the pleasure of seeing the first young poults following along behind a turkey hen in the springtime. It's a lot like seeing the first spotted fawn looking back at you in late summer. Suddenly, you know that you are probably doing something right.

For people like us there is a similar pleasure at finding the first handful of acorns under a young oak we have planted, cultivated and watched very carefully. In the past ten to twenty years, the sawtooth oak has practically become a requirement among those who are serious about their deer hunting. But the informed land manager is discovering that there are some other "acorn trees" as well, and that it makes sense to add these other varieties.

There are more than 30 species of oaks in the Eastern U.S. including parts of the midwest, Texas and Oklahoma, and a list of oaks, with their common and Latin names, accompanies this article. This series of articles, however, will only discuss those oaks found in the Southeast and those recently being planted with success.

Like a number of articles that have appeared in *Wildlife Trends* before, this one is authored by two associates who speak from their own experience. These writers have been planting for habitat improvement for many years and learning from other land owners who are doing the same. This series of articles – covering the hard- and soft-mast trees of value to wildlife – reports on what they have discovered to work for them.

Hard mast includes acorns, beechnuts, chestnuts, hickory nuts and pecans, and among these annual crops, the acorn is most critical in the diet of white-tailed deer. Acorns are especially important in areas of poor soil, which does not otherwise provide quality browse. And often in the South, it is the fall of acorns that relieves the stress of late summer heat, drought, and reduced forage, which results from these conditions. The carbohydrates in acorns provide the fat and energy which will be needed by all deer



Sawtooth oaks are used extensively in wildlife plantings. They produce acorns at an early age compared to many native oak species.

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