

If You Choose to Feed Deer

Feeds

After considering the issues surrounding deer feeding, should you decide to feed deer, the following information on food types should be considered:

Deer food mixes: Formulated deer food mixes consisting of corn, alfalfa, oats, soybeans, molasses and several vitamins and minerals are the best choice. Many feed mills in Wisconsin sell this mixture in pellet or meal form. If such a mix is not available, rabbit, goat or horse pellets which contain at least 12% protein can be used. By late February, deer that have been accustomed to eating and digesting woody browse for most of the winter are able to digest this food.

Oats: After the formulated deer food mixtures, oats are preferred over all other supplemental foods. They provide deer with a very favorable ratio of fiber and carbohydrates.

Corn: **DO NOT** feed deer a pure corn diet. Feeding pure corn can kill deer or cause long term health issues because the high starch content can cause high acidity in the rumen which kills microorganisms necessary for digesting food.

Hay: **DO NOT** feed hay to deer. When deer have encountered low food supplies, rumen activity decreases and fermentation of fiber decreases. The fiber type in hay cannot be readily broken down. Deer can have full stomachs of hay and still die from starvation.

Additional Considerations

If your intent is to attempt to help deer survive through a severe winter, the best approach is to provide woody browse by dropping aspen or maple trees so that deer can access the twigs and buds from the tops. If that is not possible, you may start feeding a deer mix in late February and continue through snow melt or until deer have dispersed to summer habitats. March and early April is the time of winter when most deer will succumb to winter stress. Also consider the following:

- consult your local wildlife biologist before starting any feeding efforts.
- read the rules that regulate feeding.
- try to feed near sheltered areas with conifer cover that are out of the wind.

- feed only where deer currently exist to avoid pulling deer out of good winter cover.
- do not feed in areas of high human, dog, automobile, and snowmobile activity.
- place food in multiple small piles to reduce competition among deer.

The DNR's Role

The DNR's role is to ensure a healthy deer herd for the sustainable use of future generations. This requires a long term approach and **good habitat is the key.**

The Natural Resources Board has adopted the following policy that outlines the DNR's role during severe winters:

“Winter deer survival is largely dependent on fat acquired on summer range. Occasional severe winters will result in deer mortality in Wisconsin, and are considered normal for northern deer and will occur regardless of winter habitat quality. Severe deer losses can be avoided most effectively by maintaining quality summer habitat. Direct feeding is seldom effective on a regional basis and can be detrimental if done improperly. The cost and logistics of feeding enough deer to produce a measureable result in subsequent years precludes feeding as normal public policy. The DNR does recognize the public concern for malnourished deer, public desire to feed stressed deer regardless of cost or measureable results and the benefits to individual animals which are properly fed.”

Want to know more?

For more information on feeding deer please contact your local DNR Wildlife Biologist or visit our webpage at <http://dnr.wi.gov>.

Helpful links:

<http://dnr.wi.gov/topic/hunt/bait.html>

<http://dnr.wi.gov/topic/WildlifeHabitat/deermanagement.html>

<http://dnr.wi.gov/topic/wildlifehabitat/documents/wsi.pdf>

