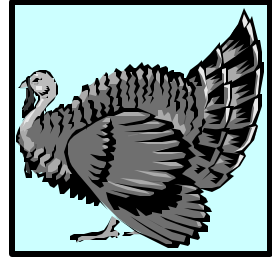


## Improving Habitat for Wild Turkey on Private Woodlands

Wild turkeys frequently range over 600 to 1,000 acres, and in some locations, they may overwinter in a location that is miles away from where they spend the spring, summer, and fall. Nonetheless, there are habitat improvements that a landowner can implement that will benefit the local wild turkey population and may encourage some birds to spend more time on the landowner's property. When planting, consider native vegetation, if seed sources are available.



1. Manage mixed stands of deciduous trees to maintain and encourage those trees that produce nuts, fruits, or seeds that turkeys prefer. Encourage these kinds of trees by cutting trees that provide little benefit to turkeys (maples, ash, elm, aspen). Also cut dying trees with hollow trunks and limbs that provide homes for squirrels, raccoons, opossums, hawks, and owls.

<u>Overstory Trees</u>	<u>Understory Trees</u>	<u>Edges &amp; Openings</u>
Oak	Ironwood	Wild Plum
Hickory	Musclewood	Hazel
Beech	Serviceberry	Mountain Ash
Black Cherry	Blackberry	Crabapples
Black Locust		Hawthorne
		Pin & Choke Cherry

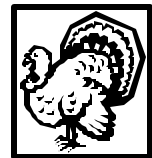
Management may include thinning, group selection cutting, and planting. Consult a professional forester or wildlife biologist for the most appropriate methods. When cutting, fell trees so that two down tops overlap each other and leave the top uncut. Hen turkeys nest under the overlapping branches. Do this only once per ten acres.

2. When cutting forest stands of oak-aspen or oak-pine, leave some oaks uncut, preferably standing in clumps. Scattered trees are more vulnerable to a variety of hazards. Do not leave too many oaks standing because their shade will inhibit aspen or pine regeneration. Consult a professional forester or wildlife biologist for the most appropriate methods.
3. Plant or encourage fruit producing shrubs growing on woodland edges or in woodland openings.
  - a) Plant a variety of species so that fruit is available from late spring to late winter – crabapples, hawthornes, dogwoods, viburnums, bush honeysuckles, autumn olive, etc.
  - b) Shrubs will probably need mouse, rabbit, and deer guards in order to quickly grow beyond vulnerable size (more than 5 feet tall and 3 inches diameter). For a **mouse guard**,

use ¼ inch mesh welded wire, sheet metal, or synthetic material 12 inches high encircling trees. **For deer and rabbit guards**, use 1 inch mesh woven wire or synthetic material 4-5 feet high, encircling trees.

c) To encourage desired plants already growing, cut away competing woody plants, thin and prune if necessary, and fertilize.

4. Manage open areas: Mow and fertilize open grassy areas to produce nutritious and palatable grasses, clovers, and other forbs in spring and summer (check with County MSU Extension Office for most appropriate mowing schedules and fertilizer application rates). In general, mow at least once a year, preferably three times (late spring, summer, and early fall) and fertilize with 200-300 lbs/acre of 6-24-24 or 0-20-20 fertilizer in late spring and late fall. If possible, mow 1/3 of the area at a time. Sewer sludge or manure may also be applied.



5. Plant nutritious perennial grasses and legumes.

a) Frost seed wild white or Dutch white clover and red clover to bare sunny spots (broadcast inoculated seed when the last few frosts leave surface of soil). Check with the County MSU Extension Office to determine if lime is required.

b) Consider planting Imperial Whitetail Clover. Unfortunately, it is three times more expensive than wild or Dutch white clover, will not grow on dry, wet, or poor soils, and requires extensive seedbed preparation. However, its high protein content is very beneficial and attractive to turkeys. If you choose to plant this variety, remember that you must herbicide, plow, disc, lime, and fertilize, and seed drill or cultipac. The expense is probably not justified for deer, given the alternatives, but may be justified for turkeys.

c) Maintain planting with liming, mowing, and fertilizing as necessary (see #3).

6. Avoid planting annuals that may be destroyed quickly by deer or that produce turkey food only in fall and winter. Such annuals are expensive to cultivate and less likely to help attract turkeys. Wild game food sorghum, also called Oklahoma short wildlife sorghum, is an exception. It has a high tannic acid content until it ripens, making it unattractive to wildlife until it ripens, and its short stiff stalk holds seed heads above the snow but within reach of turkeys. Plant it in rows along the edges of woodlands. If the land bordering your woodlands produces corn, try to arrange to have 2-4 rows of corn left standing on the edge of the woods.