

Attracting Doves...Legally

South Carolina's Official Planting Guide for Mourning Dove Fields

Planting and cultivating dove fields are popular techniques used by South Carolina sportsmen, landowners, and land managers to attract doves, as well as to provide food and cover for a wide range of wildlife species. Careful planning, and an understanding of the legal guidelines for planting and managing dove fields, is essential to producing a successful and legal dove field. Best management practices for establishing any successful supplemental plantings for wildlife enhance seed germination, plant growth, and provide nutrients for wildlife for prolonged periods of time. With proper planning and management, seeds produced by native broadleaf herbaceous plants (e.g. ragweed, crotons, lespedezas, beggar-weeds, partridge pea) and native grasses (e.g. panic grasses, paspalums, barnyard grass) can also provide food and cover for doves and other wildlife year-round.

This publication provides guidelines for establishing a variety of seed-producing plants preferred by doves in South Carolina, as well as for common and legal small grain agricultural practices that also attract doves. Although doves may be attracted using a variety of small grain agricultural practices, the intent of these practices is for agricultural purposes and not for the sole purpose of luring and attracting doves for shooting, which the U.S. Fish and



Mourning Dove
(*Zenaida macroura*)



Manipulating Crops is a Legal Practice for Doves

Wildlife Service defines as baiting. In addition, many of these practices are short-term and do not provide long-term benefits and value to doves and other wildlife, as compared to a variety of well-established wildlife plantings that produce seed, forage, and cover for wildlife year-round.

Practices Not Acceptable and Illegal

1. Sowing seeds several times in succession on the same ground.
2. Piling, clumping, or concentrating small grains on the ground. Broadcasted small grain seeds must be spread evenly across the entire planting area, and for optimal germination, covered 1 – 1 ½ inch by soil or crop residue.
3. According to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, seeds freshly planted for the purpose of luring, attracting, or enticing doves within gun range will be considered baiting, and hunting doves in these areas is illegal.

Important Considerations

- Establishing dove fields with a variety of wildlife plantings provides food throughout the hunting season for doves and other wildlife.

Recommended Plantings for Doves and Agricultural Practices that Attract Doves

Plant Species	Planting Dates (maturing time)	Seeding Rate	Planting Depth and Method	Recommendations
Browntop Millet	May 1 – July 15 (60 - 70 days)	Rows: 30 - 42 inches apart @ 8 - 10 lbs/acre Drilled: 20 - 35 lbs/acre Broadcast: 25 lbs/acre	1/4 - 1/2 inch	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plant on well-prepared seedbed • Plant 3 acres or more, 60-80 days before season • Several plantings, 2-4 weeks apart • If drilled, need to mow strips; can burn or rake mowed strips • Soil test or 10-10-10 at 500 lbs/acre and pH 6.0 - 6.5
Dove and White Proso Millet	May 1 – July 1 (80 - 90 days)	Rows: 30 - 42 inches apart @ 8 - 10 lbs/ acre Drilled: 20 - 35 lbs/acre Broadcast: 25 lbs/acre	1/4 - 1/2 inch	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plant on well-prepared seedbed • Plant 3 acres or more • Row planting is best for doves • If drilled, need to mow strips; can burn or rake mowed strips • Soil test or 10-10-10 at 500 lbs/acre and pH 6.0 - 6.5
Sunflowers	April 15 – July 1 (110 - 120 days)	Seeds 8 - 10 inches apart in rows 36 or 38 inches apart (6 - 10 lbs/acre)	1 - 1 ½ inch	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plant on well-prepared seedbed • Plant 5 acres or more • May shred or mow a part of the field as season approaches • Small-seeded oil-type sunflowers are preferred • Require cultivation and herbicide to control weed competition • Damage from deer browsing is likely • Soil test or 10-10-10 at 500 - 600 lbs/acre and pH 6.0 - 6.5 • Seed production enhanced by adding 0.4 to 1 lb boron/acre or following soil test recommendations
Corn	March 1 – April 30 (150 days)	Rows: 36 - 40 inches apart @ 12 - 15 lbs/acre	1 - 1 ½ inches	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plant on well-prepared seedbed • Leave corn standing around edge of field, harvest mechanically, burn after harvest, or use normal agricultural practices with seeds remaining in field • Soil test and pH 6.0 - 6.5
Sorghum	May 15 – July 1 (80 - 140 days)	3-5 plants/linear foot in rows 30-36 inches apart (usually 4 - 7 lbs/acre)	1 inch	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plant on well-prepared seedbed • Known for being drought tolerant • Soil test or 10-10-10 at 500 - 600 lbs /acre and pH 5.8 - 6.5
Sesame (Benne)	May 1 – June 15 (120 - 150 days)	Rows: 36 or 38 inches apart @ 3 - 5 lbs/acre	1/2 inch	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plant on well-prepared seedbed • 3-4 diskings in May before planting will help control weeds • Soil test or 10-10-10 at 500 - 600 lbs/acre and pH 6.0 - 6.5

Recommended Plantings for Doves and Agricultural Practices that Attract Doves

Plant Species	Planting Dates (maturing time)	Seeding Rate	Planting Depth and Method	Recommendations
Small Grains (wheat, oat, barley, rye, and triticale)				
1. Agronomic Crop Production or Livestock Grazing	Oct. 1 – Nov. 30 (230 - 260 days)	Drill 80 - 120 lbs/acre	1 - 1 ½ inches	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Intent:</u> Grown for grain production and harvest, or livestock grazing. • Plant on well-prepared seedbed • Soil test or 20 -50 lbs of nitrogen/acre and pH 5.8 - 6.5 • Caution: Planting any earlier than November 1 for wheat may increase incidence of Hessian fly infestation.
2. Cover Crop for Erosion Control	Oct. 1 – Nov. 30 (230 - 260 days)	Drill 60 - 80 lbs/acre, or evenly broadcast 80 - 120 lbs/acre	Broadcasting/aerial seeding is only recommended 1) into cotton prior to defoliation, 2) into peanuts prior to digging, 3) into soybeans prior to leaf drop, 4) prior to mowing crop residue in high residue crops, 5) on a prepared seedbed and cultipacked to ensure seed to soil contact, or 6) when covered with 1-1 ½ inches of soil.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Intent:</u> Used to reduce sheet and rill soil erosion and reduce runoff on tilled crop and pasture lands. • Rye, oats and triticale recommended, wheat and barley are not recommended.
3. Cover Crop for Soil Improvement	Oct. 1 – Nov. 30 (230 - 260 days)	Drill 60 - 80 lbs/acre, or evenly broadcast 80 - 120 lbs/acre	Broadcasting/aerial seeding is only recommended 1) into cotton prior to defoliation, 2) into peanuts prior to digging, 3) into soybeans prior to leaf drop, or 4) prior to mowing crop residue in high residue crops.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Intent:</u> Improve soil structure, soil organic matter, and provide weed suppression. • Rye, oats and triticale recommended, wheat and barley are not recommended.
4. Erosion Control	Oct. 1 – Nov. 30 (230 - 260 days)	Drill 80 – 120 lbs/acre or evenly broadcast 120 -150 lbs /acre	Scarify soil surface prior to broadcasting.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Intent:</u> Used to prevent soil erosion on disturbed areas. • Cultipack on bare soil to ensure seed to soil contact. • Mulching with straw 1.5 tons/acre to assist with germination. • Used only on contours, drainages or land classified as highly erodible by NRCS guidelines. • Caution: Planting any earlier than November 1 for wheat may increase incidence of Hessian fly infestation.
5. Wildlife Planting for Forage or Grain Production	Oct. 1 – Nov. 30 (230 - 260 days)	Drill 80 - 150 lbs/acre or evenly broadcast up to 200 lbs/ acre	For optimal germination 1) cover seeds 1 – 1 ½ inches with soil, or 2) evenly broadcast on well-prepared seedbed established with heavy tilling.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Intent:</u> To produce vegetation (forage) or seeds from plantings to provide supplemental food for wildlife (not the planted seeds themselves). • Plant on well-prepared seedbed. • Soil test or 20 -50 lbs of nitrogen/acre and pH 5.8 - 6.5. • Caution: Planting any earlier than November 1 for wheat may increase incidence of Hessian fly infestation.

- Certified Seed: Use of certified seed provides a level of insurance against poor germination, seed-borne diseases, and weeds. PVP varieties (covered under the Plant Variety Protection Act) can only be saved for seed by the grower for use on their own land. Patented varieties cannot be saved for seed. Check with seed companies for legal requirements.
- To enhance dove use of fields, keep areas between rows weed-free by cultivating or using herbicides following label guidelines with special considerations to possible negative effects to pollinators and native bees.
- Plan for at least a portion of the field to mature two weeks prior to hunting.
- Scout fields several weeks in advance of hunting to determine use by doves.
- Limit dove shooting to 1-2 days a week. Too much shooting will cause doves to move to other areas.
- Manipulating portions of the field by mowing, chopping, burning, or disking prior to hunting will help expose seeds and attract doves to the field.



Dove Proso Millet (*Panicum miliaceum*)

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