Liming Wildlife Food Plots

Tennessee Department of Agriculture, Division of Forestry

Liming is often as important as fertilizing. Lime "liberates" nutrients stored in the soil. As lime makes soils less acidic, it also enhances the growth of soil microorganisms. This is especially important for the bacteria used to inoculate legumes. Legumes do best in non-acid soils, ideally at pH levels (a measure of acidity) of 6.0 to 7.0. By comparison, many forest soils in Tennessee have pH values of 5.5, which is moderately acidic.

Lime comes in a range of forms, from powder to grit to pellets. The finer the grind, the more immediate the effect the lime will have on soil acidity, but the more rapidly the effect will dissipate.

Till in the lime before planting the crop, ideally several months in advance so that the soil pH has time to adjust. If more than 2 tons per acre are called for, it is best to spread the lime in 2 applications 6 months apart. In planning the time to lime, schedule a time when farmers are not liming their fields. Commercial applicators are more likely to take small jobs during the off-season.

Take soil samples to your Extension office to determine how much lime to apply. In Tennessee two tons per acre is usually needed, but some forest sites may require up to three or four tons per acre. For accessible sites, powdered lime plus commercial application cost will run $20+ per ton per acre. Manual application of bags of pelletized lime on plots inaccessible to spreader trucks will run about $80-100 per ton per acre for the lime alone.

Version 12-03