Even though Escambia County winters can be relatively mild, wildlife still have to find food when the cold winds blow. People establish environments conducive to wildlife for a variety of reasons, and depending on your intent, there are different methods of providing food for wildlife. Many hunting enthusiasts focus on establishing wildlife food plots, and although it does encourage wildlife to visit, this is probably the most expensive way to attract wildlife because the plot needs regular attention and care. All property owners can work with their existing landscapes and wooded areas to provide an oasis for a variety of wildlife. Here are some helpful hints:

**Utilize Mast to the Utmost**

**Mast** is a term used by biologist that refers to the seeds and fruits of trees and shrubs. Mast is by far the easiest way to provide seasonal food sources for wildlife. There are two categories of mast: **Hard** (hard-shelled seeds like acorns, hickory nuts, pecans) and **Soft** (soft, fleshy fruits like blackberries, pawpaws and persimmons). Hard mast works like an energy bar for animals in the winter because it is high in fat, carbs, and protein. Soft mast is essential to many migrating species—birds are very dependent on soft mast.

Growing oak trees to produce acorns will provide an excellent food source for deer and turkey. Research has shown that in autumn, the diets of white-tailed deer and wild turkey can be comprised of up to 70% acorns. Plant a variety of oaks to encourage diversity. For more information on using oaks to promote wildlife, visit this site: [http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/pdffiles/UW/UW29300.pdf](http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/pdffiles/UW/UW29300.pdf) or contact the Escambia County Extension office for a copy.
Provide **Openings** for Wildlife

Most forested sites do not have a lot of openings for other vegetation to become established. Many of our woodlands do not have a lot of diversity of food sources. Open spaces have grasses, herbaceous plants, various insects, berries, small mammals, nesting habitat, and sites for territorial displays and watching for predators. Properly planned openings not only provide important wildlife habitat, but also can add to the attractiveness of your property, serve as firebreaks, and increase internal access. Openings may be located along roads, rights-of-way, fence lines, on old log decks, and in strips between different aged plantations. You can plan to scatter several irregular small openings throughout the forest or leave entire old fallow fields unplanted.

Where grass cover is missing, seed clover or grass. Mow regularly to prevent the intrusion of shrubs and trees. Use rotational mowing (mow different areas at different times of the year) to encourage a wider variety of plants and available mast. Disk established ground covers periodically to enhance species and mast diversity. To avoid the disturbance of ground-nesting species such as turkey and quail, and to promote the growth of important wildlife foods such as partridge pea, ragweed, and beggarweed, mow and disk during the winter months (December–February).

**Consider Edge Plantings**

Edge plantings should be at least 20 feet wide. Have a base of large trees, and plant a diversity of species of varying heights. Plants like wax-myrtle, native hollies, hawthorn, crabapple, dogwood, wild plum, bicolor lespedeza, sumac, persimmon, cherries, blackberries, honeysuckle, greenbriar, and blueberries are some of the species suitable for edge plantings. You can allow these to grow into solid thickets, which will provide both food and cover.

These are just a few ways to promote wildlife to utilize your land. For more information, visit [http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/topic_wildlife_forages](http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/topic_wildlife_forages) or contact your local IFAS Extension agent.

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