

The Habitat Corner

MAKING THE MOST OF YOUR WOODLAND TRACT

Sitting on the front porch of their modest weekend get-away cabin listening to the forest songbirds sing and turkeys gobble while watching their trees grow is music to the ears of Robert and Laura Qualman.



"Tree farming is the best investment an outdoors person can make. You have a piece of property you can manage for wildlife and create an income at the same time. Is there an investment that can top that?" exclaim the Qualmans.

With most investments, success does not simply just happen, but requires attention and occasional hard work. In 1993 the Qualmans purchased 289 acres of hardwoods in Humphreys County. Wanting to eventually pass on property to his children that would not be a financial burden, Robert sought ways to make the land produce income. So they met with foresters from the Tennessee Division of Forestry for advice.

"The foresters showed me the poor quality of the trees on the drier South facing slopes, so we first converted 30 acres to pines which are better adapted to those sites while leaving the good quality oaks on the moister north slopes and valleys. I spent weekends over the next 6 months deadening the existing trees and brush with herbicides and tools as site preparation recommended by the foresters," said Robert. "The Westvaco (now MeadWestvaco) timber company created a management plan for me and provided the loblolly pine seedlings at no cost, and I signed up for the Tree Farm and Forest Stewardship programs. Over the next 2 years, we converted an additional 150 acres of unproductive hardwoods to pine."

Their habitat work also included creating several small meadows and planting over 200 fruit or berry producing native trees and shrubs such as persimmon, crabapple, hawthorne and apple. They plan to soon harvest more mature timber and create a ½ mile long linear opening. Robert noted, "We had some quail when the pines were young with a broomsedge understory, but we haven't seen any in the last few years. By keeping some of the land in openings and periodically thinning and burning in the pines, we hope to entice them back. The wild turkeys sure have responded to our habitat work!"

The Qualmans' carefully planned and executed forest management earned them the "2010 Tennessee Tree Farmer of the Year" award.

HABITAT TIPS:

When planting trees and shrubs, matching the right native seedlings to the right soils, topography, and light conditions is very important, so don't just purchase any seedlings that seem attractive. The Tennessee Division of Forestry's nursery (<http://www.tn.gov/agriculture/publications/forestry/seedlingcatalog.pdf>) is a good place to start. The Forest*A*Syst booklet, available from your local UT Extension office, provides excellent information on management possibilities for your woodlands. Having both a forester and wildlife biologist work together will help ensure a plan that adequately addresses both your timber and wildlife goals.

HABITAT PROGRAM OPPORTUNITIES:

Free forest management planning is available through the Tree Farm program (Tennessee Forestry Association, 615-883-3832) or local Tennessee Division of Forestry office. Your local TWRA or USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service private lands biologist can help guide you to USDA cost-share possibilities. Obtaining Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI) certification at no cost through the Tree Farm program will help ensure that landowners get top dollar for their timber in future years as the forest industry seeks to encourage our nations' forestlands to be managed in an ecologically wise manner.

ASK THE BIOLOGIST:

Q: I've heard that sawtooth oak is the best oak to plant for wildlife. Is this true?

A: Oaks are one of the most common trees in Tennessee and twenty distinct oaks are native to our state. However, sawtooth oak (*Quercus acutissima*) is native to east Asia and was brought to the U.S. in 1962. The advantage lauded to sawtooth oak is its earlier acorn production, typically at 8-10 years of age versus 20-30 years for native oaks. One huge disadvantage of sawtooth is that its branching characteristics make it a low value timber tree compared to native oaks. Bottom line: if future timber income is a goal don't plant sawtooths, or limit their planting to the occasional "shade tree".

"Helping Landowners and Wildlife Through Habitat Enhancement"

The Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency has Private Lands Biologists that will assist you in developing a management plan for your property and a strategy to implement it. See www.TWRAPrivateLands.org for who to contact for technical assistance and other useful information on habitat management and programs.