

Mineral Madness

Are They For the Common Hunter?

By Nick Pinizzotto
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It wasn't all that long ago that attracting deer to your area was as simple as going to the local feed store and picking up an inexpensive salt block. Whether you were trying to establish a feeding pattern through your favorite hunting area or simply wanted to view deer on the back forty, the salt block was the answer. If you haven't noticed, I'm here to tell you that the world of feeding supplemental minerals to deer has become a lot more complex.

A Variety of Products to Choose From

If you watch hunting shows on television or read just about any deer hunting magazine, you've undoubtedly seen an advertisement for minerals guaranteed to produce healthier deer and bigger bucks. Although your initial reaction may have been to shrug it off as just another gimmick, I wouldn't be surprised if you haven't been tempted to drop a container or two in your cart while visiting your favorite sporting goods store. Maybe it's just the fancy packaging, but it's likely the possibility of growing a monster buck on your hunting ground that tempts you.

What started out as a few select products on the market has quickly grown into mineral mania. In fact, while visiting one of the larger chain outdoor stores in my area to do a little product research, I was shocked to see that they dedicated an entire aisle to deer nutritional products. What I was also surprised to see was much of the inventory was gone, meaning people must be opening their wallets to give supplemental mineral feeding a shot.

One thing I learned was that there is a product for virtually any situation. You can purchase minerals in liquid, powder, pellet, rock, and of course, block forms. There are also several flavors available. I noted everything from apple to sweet corn, and just about every other flavor in between.

Nearly all of the products contained two common ingredients, dried molasses and salt. Of all of the materials listed, these two seemed to be the ones that provided the attraction. In general, I found many of the products to be very similar based on their guaranteed analyses, which is important to know if you're shopping for the best price. The per pound price of the most popular products on the market range from \$1 to \$3.



There are enough different mineral products on the market to make your head spin. By checking the labels, you can better compare each product and determine the best prices.

Our Simple Study

Because the average hunter doesn't have the time or expertise to conduct an extensive scientific study on the impact of mineral supplements on their local deer herd, we've decided to conduct our study in a way that best exemplifies this scenario. It is not scientific in nature, and is based solely on

our observations and opinions.

Very simply, we began feeding minerals on our management property in Indiana County, Pennsylvania in early March, and will continue to do so until late into the summer. We will evaluate the results by general deer observations using trail cameras and actual sightings during the hunting season. We will then resume feeding in January following the final Pennsylvania hunting season, and feed through next summer. The feeding areas will always be supplied with an ample supply of minerals.

GUARANTEED ANALYSIS	
Calcium	Min. 12.00% - Max. 14.00%
Phosphorus	Min. 4.00%
Salt	Min. 17.00% - Max. 20.00%
Potassium	Min. 4.45%
Magnesium	Min. 3.40%
Zinc	Min. 0.18%
Copper	Min. 0.008%
Iodine	Min. 0.005%
Iron	Min. 0.005%
Cobalt	Min. 0.0015%
Sulfur	Min. 0.001%
Selenium	Min. 0.001%
Vitamin A	Min. 90,000 IU/lb.
Vitamin D	Min. 20,000 IU/lb.
Vitamin E	Min. 40 IU/lb.

Analysis of a popular deer mineral product.



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We established new feeding areas along known travel corridors in early March.

According to most professional opinion, the most critical time of year for deer health, and the time of year that has a lot to do with antler growth, is late winter and early spring when nutritional food sources are scarce. Many believe, and we concur, that if you're going to choose a time to feed supplemental minerals, this is the time of year to do it. It is important, however, to maintain a constant supply of minerals at your feeding sites. Establishing a new food source for deer during the toughest winter months, and then taking it away due to not replenishing the supply can be harmful. Please do your homework on supplemental feeding prior to starting a program in your hunting area. We suggest talking with your local Quality Deer Management Association field representative. You can visit their website at www.qdma.org.

What We Hope to Learn

We have established three simple goals for our study. They are, in order of priority:

1. Is there a noticeable difference in antler growth?
2. What deer feed at our sites the most (does, young bucks, mature bucks)?
3. Do the feeding sites impact travel patterns on the property?

We hope you'll follow along with us as we attempt to shed some light on feeding supplemental minerals to deer over the next year. If you have any stories or experiences to share, please let us know, and we will report it in an upcoming Arrow Points article.



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After just a few weeks, the deer totally exhausted the mineral supply, and did a number on the terrain as well.