

Doves are herbivorous and feed primarily on seeds of native weeds, grasses and small agronomic grains. Doves require “grit” (small bits of sand or gravel) in their diet to help grind food in the gizzard. They locate food by sight and are weak scratchers; therefore, they prefer to feed where seed is on bare ground.

A strategic plan is essential when preparing and managing dove fields. Seriously consider the following points: (1) selection of plantings to attract doves during the entire season, (2) legality and timing of agricultural practices and (3) a harvest or shooting schedule.

**PLANTINGS:** Fields planted in a combination of crops with staggered maturation dates extend the time fields are attractive to doves. Combination plantings also reduce risk of total crop failure due to insects or adverse weather. Agronomic crops highly preferred by doves include browntop millet, sunflowers, dove proso millet, corn and grain sorghum. Consult a planting guide for detailed planting instructions.



Winter wheat can be top sown for doves if done in a manner approved by the Alabama Cooperative Extension System (ACES). An excellent reference brochure produced by ACES is available [online](#) for all dove hunters and managers.

**TIMING:** After early crops mature, mow a portion of the field at least two weeks before the expected shooting date. Continue to mow strips weekly to clean the ground and scatter seeds – this might help hold doves on the field. Burning parts of fields with dense crop residue can increase food availability.

**HARVEST:** Since dove fields can be easily over-harvested, implement a harvest or shooting schedule to regulate hunting pressure. A schedule might include shooting only in the morning, limiting all day shoots to one per week or ending shoots at least one hour before sunset to allow doves undisturbed access to fields to feed and water before roosting.

**REGULATIONS:** Doves are migratory birds that can be hunted within a framework of regulations established by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Both federal and state law enforcement officers enforce these regulations. Therefore, careful attention should be placed on federal and state regulations concerning dove field management. A consultation with a conservation officer might help avoid an illegal situation.

Photo Credit: Claude Jenkins



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