



Quail Covey Headquarters



PURPOSE:

Quail covey headquarters (QCH's) are clumps of dense shrubby cover with a canopy at least three feet high and little vegetation at ground level. Quail need and use this type of patchy "escape" cover on a daily basis. They use headquarters to avoid the hot summer sun and seek protection from predators and harsh winter weather. Without this habitat component, few quail will be present. Placement of QCH's within the landscape can influence where and how much time quail spend within their home range. This habitat component should be placed next to early successional vegetation such as managed wildlife friendly grasses/legumes/forbs and tilled or disked soil in order to be most effective. QCH's can be created by planting shrubs, edge feathering, placing downed tree structures, or improving existing shrub thickets.

SPECIFICATIONS:

- Establish at least 0.1 to 1.0 acre of dense shrubby/woody cover per 5-40 acres adjacent to wildlife friendly plantings of grasses/legumes/forbs and adequate bare ground. The minimum size of a QCH is 30'X50' totaling 1500 square feet in size. It takes three QCH's of this size to equal 0.1 acre. In general, optimum QCH's are 3'-12' in height.
- For optimal quail habitat, the QCH's should be no more than 150' apart and adjacent to early successional vegetation such as managed wildlife friendly grass-legumes/forbs, field borders, food plots, or cropland.
- Kill existing grass (regardless of type) before installing new headquarters, and around existing QCHs. Removing this vegetation provides good growing conditions for annual food plants and shrubs and maintains an open structure along the ground that allows for easy quail movement. It may be necessary to re-treat any invasive grasses every 2-5 years within and adjacent to QCH's.
- It will generally take at least five years for planted shrubs to gain enough growth to provide adequate protective cover. To provide instant usable protective cover while the shrub plantings are developing, simultaneously utilize either Edge Feathering and/or Downed Tree Structures in close proximity to the newly planted shrubs.



*Example: 40' x 40' QCH block planting.
100 shrubs. 4' spacing. 1,600 sq. ft.*

COVEY HEADQUARTERS DESCRIPTIONS

PLANTED QCH's:

Plant bare root or container grown shrubs. Preferred native shrub species include American or sand hill plum, fragrant sumac, blackberry, and rough leaf dogwood. Other good species include smooth sumac, elderberry, chokecherry, and false indigo bush. QCHs may be planted to a single species to mimic a natural shrub thicket or multiple shrub species can also be used to provide vegetative diversity within a QCH. Weed barrier fabric may be used to increase shrub survival, however it should be removed after the shrubs are well established as spreading and suckering of the shrubs is desired. If deer damage is a concern, fragrant sumac, false indigo bush, and blackberry are recommended for use. Placing shrub protectors around planting stock will also help deter deer and rabbit damage.

EDGE FEATHERED QCH's:

Edge feathering is a border of brushy and downed vegetation, a minimum of 30' wide, created along woodland edges, existing tree lines, woody draws, and hedgerows. This practice creates a transitional zone of woody escape cover made of downed trees, shrubs, vines, and herbaceous vegetation between cropland/grassland and the wooded edge.

DOWNED TREE STRUCTURE QCH's:

Downed tree structures (DTS) are a temporary source of woody cover and can be used where adequate cover does not already exist. DTS must be a minimum of 30' x 50' in size. Trees used should be well-branched and resistant to decay, such as Osage orange, oak, or cedar.

EXISTING SHRUB THICKET QCH's:

Existing dogwood and plum QCH's can be improved by cutting any trees that are adjacent to or overtop shrub thickets. (Figure 1.) Existing shrub QCH's should be completely renovated once they attain a height of 15 feet with a chainsaw or clipper. Do not treat the shrub stumps with herbicide since re-sprouting is desired. Cutting down older stems will encourage new shoot growth. Fescue, brome and other grasses often invade many existing shrub QCH's making them unusable to quail and other grassland birds. These grasses should be treated with a herbicide after the shrubs go dormant in the fall. Re-treat every 2-5 years to keep the grasses suppressed.

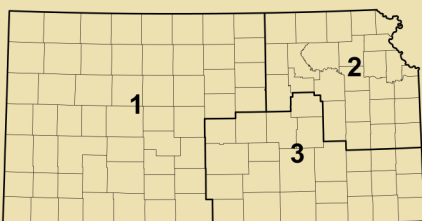


Figure 1. Tall trees should be cut and stumps treated to maintain shrubby cover.

MAINTENANCE:

- Use herbicides to suppress invasive vegetation and to control noxious weeds.
- Protect new QCHs from prescribed burning, disking, and livestock. Plantings should be protected from non-selective herbicide applications.
- Consider marking QCH plantings with a permanent marker to help identify these areas when conducting management practices or weed control.
- Supplement Edge Feathered and Downed Tree Structure QCHs with new felled trees when the existing downed material begins to rot away.

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