

COVER CROP

WHAT IS COVER CROP?

Any crop grown to cover bare soil as a way to improve and protect soil during a dormant season. The following spring, crops are incorporated into the soil while still green or just after flowering before they go to seed. As they decompose, microbial activity breaks down the organic matter and creates nutrients that other plants can access. For this reason, cover crops are often referred to as “green manure”.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF PLANTING COVER CROPS?

- Acts as thick ground cover to suppress weeds
- Improves soil texture and reduces compaction via aggressive root system
- Prevents erosion
- Acts as host to beneficial insects
- Improves fertility, in the case of legumes, fixes (stores) nitrogen which is released when crops are tilled into the soil next spring

WHEN/HOW SHOULD I PLANT COVER CROP?

A cover crop can be seeded as soon as any vegetable crop has reached maturity and has been harvested. If you have late fall crops, you can sow the cover crop seed in between the rows. Sow seeds while the weather is still warm enough for the seeds to germinate, usually before November. Simply spade or till the soil after harvest and sow the cover crop seed, raking the seed into the top 1/4” of soil. Keep moist.

WHAT SHOULD I PLANT?

Popular seeds are Rye grain and Legumes, such as Crimson Clover (strains), Garden Pea (strains), Vetch, and Faba (Fava) Beans. These can be planted as a single crop or are often mixed and planted as a blend because of the various benefits offered by different crops.

Austrian Peas: Builds tilth and enriches soil. Late Sept -Mid-Nov.

Crimson Clover: Good weed controller and enriches the soil. Late Sept-Mid-Oct.

Faba Beans: Matures early. Deep roots help break up compacted soil. Late Sept-Mid-Nov.

Hairy Vetch: Winter hardy vining annual. Prefers well-drained soil. Late Sept-Mid-Nov.

Rye: Germinates quickly and grows rapidly in cool weather. Sept.-early Nov.

THEN WHAT?

Cover crops seeded in the fall will continue to grow all winter whenever it is warm, and then be ready to be spaded or tilled-in just before planting time in late winter or early spring. **Do this while the crop is in full bloom before it reseeds.**