

August Newsletter



Cover Crop Chat

By now, the wheat is off and hopefully you had the chance to take advantage of wheat prices north of \$6. Poverty grass? I think not! That being said, with the harvest of one crop wrapped up, it is time to start thinking about what you can do with your soil now for next year's crop. Cover crops are an excellent option for reducing soil erosion, helping to improve soil structure and, most importantly, bring a nutrient benefit to your farm. Below is an outline of six different cover crops that are commonly used and what features they bring to your operation.



RED CLOVER

Can be used as a nitrogen source for next year's crop due to its ability to fix nitrogen. It helps with water holding capacity, infiltration and permeability of soil. Most often frost seeded into winter wheat in the spring.



OILSEED RADISH

With rapid growth and a deep taproot, this cover crop is ideal for aiding with compacted soils and building subsoil. Oilseed radish also has the ability to scavenge for nitrogen and help with water holding capacity, infiltration and permeability of soil.



WINTER PEAS

Similar to red clover, winter peas will fix nitrogen. Often found in "cover crop cocktail" mixes with oats as a feed source for livestock. It has the ability to release an allelopathic compound that causes reduced growth in grass seedlings.



ANNUAL RYEGRASS

A cover crop with many benefits: builds soil with its dense root system, reduces runoff and reduces erosion. Studies show that it has the ability to reduce field populations of Soybean Cyst Nematode (SCN). It scavenges for leftover nitrogen



PHACELIA

Popular in Europe, phacelia uptakes excess nitrogen and calcium in soils. Its fibrous root system is very dense, which creates an intense soil conditioning effect in the top two inches of soil. Phacelia is also known for its ability to aggregate soil particles - this helps your soil to have the structure of high quality soil. Winterkills easily and an incredible foraging source for bees.



OATS

With its ability to develop a thick crop canopy, oats are able to smother out other weeds. Most often this cover crop is used to help reduce soil erosion and provide a means for wind protection in fields. Oats will scavenge for nitrogen and once they winterkill, this scavenged nitrogen will be released as the plant decomposes.

Selecting a Cover Crop

Each type of cover crop brings a unique set of advantages to your operation. Before choosing which cover crop to use on your farm, consider the following in your decision making plan:

1. What are the top three requirements you need from your cover crop? Nitrogen scavenging? Soil building?
2. Consider the cover crop's growth type and be sure to kill off the crop before it has the potential to become a problem (here's looking at you grassy cover crops)
3. If you're thinking of making a "cover crop cocktail", understand which cover crops compliment one another.



Making Your Own Cover Crop Cocktail

By now, you have decided that using a cover crop is worth your while. However, there is one lingering challenge: with so many cover crop options, how do you decide which one to use? Fear not, Cover Crop Mixology 101 is here to help! Though you can use a single species of cover crop to meet your operation's needs, there is the option to mix various species together. Read on to find out about some different cocktails being used on farm.

OATS & WINTER PEAS

If you have livestock, this mix is for you. Both oats and peas can be harvest as a feed source for your beloved four legged creatures. Working in conjunction with one another, the peas will produce nitrogen while the oats scavenge for this same nutrient.

OATS, OILSEED RADISH & RED CLOVER

This triple threat cocktail of cover crops work in unison with one another as well: clover is a nitrogen source and the scavenging of nitrogen is left to oats and oilseed radish.

ANNUAL RYEGRASS & OILSEED RADISH

Consider this mix if your previous crop had a heavy dose of nitrogen applied to it - both of these cover crops are nitrogen scavengers and will find anything leftover in the soil. Taking a look underground, this duo makes for a good soil building team with the dense shallow roots of annual ryegrass and deep taproot of oilseed radish.

OATS & OILSEED RADISH

Much like the ryegrass and oilseed radish mix, this pair is a dream team to aid in building your soil quality. Oats take care of the shallow soil surface and oilseed radish's taproot reach down into lower soil horizons to help with any compaction issues you may have.

Quick Reminder

With all the positive contributions that cover crops make to a farm operation, there are a few potential problems you can run into with cover crops if you are not careful:

1. Do not use any radish-type cover crop if growing sugar beets or another brassica
2. Ensure that you kill off annual ryegrass in a timely fashion before it becomes a challenge in the field
3. Though the long taproot of oilseed radish is very advantageous, be sure that it is killed off before the taproot reaches any tiles in your field.