

COVER CROPS

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Cover crops are a temporary crop that are planted in the fall, then tilled into the soil in the spring to add organic matter and nutrients to the soil. There are two general types of cover crop – leguminous and nonleguminous. Leguminous cover crops, such as Austrian Field Peas and Crimson Clover, add nitrogen to the soil. Nonleguminous ones, such as wheat and ryegrass, are preferred on erosive soils due to more winter growth and a fibrous root system.

It is important to plant cover crops early to establish early root growth before cold weather occurs. This helps the crops better survive a hard winter. Plant between mid-September to the end of November for best success. In the spring, till the cover crop into the soil before it goes to seed.

There are many benefits to growing cover crops –

- reduced soil erosion and compaction during winter
- improved soil structure and reduced surface crusting
- increased water-holding capacity of the soil
- reduced winter weed growth
- provide nitrogen if the cover crop is a legume

AUSTRIAN FIELD PEAS

Austrian Field Peas make an excellent winter cover crop in this area, due to their excellent adaptation to heavy wet soil. Austrian Field Peas are a nitrogen fixing legume, which means they pull nitrogen from the air in large quantity for their own use, and this nitrogen is then added to your soil when you till the peas in spring. These Field Peas should create a lush mass of foliage within a few weeks, and will last all winter.

The recommended seeding rate is 2-3 pounds per 1000 square feet.



CRIMSON CLOVER

Crimson Clover is probably the most commonly used and most desirable of the clovers grown for a cover crop. It is an upright, winter annual that is native to Europe. This nitrogen fixing legume is tolerant of most soil types and prefers a sun to partial sun location. Crimson Clover will grow to 6-18 inches, and blooms from March to May with deep red flowers. For best results, plow into soil 2-3 weeks before the succeeding crop is planted.

The recommended seeding rate is 1 pound per 1000 square feet.

