

Cover Crops

Your garden has done a great job of feeding you this season, why not return the favor? Instead of leaving the ground open over the winter, consider planting a cover crop, also known as green manure. Cover crops can add organic matter to the soil, reduce soil erosion, suppress weeds, and help to maintain the integrity of the soil.

There are several types of green manures from which to choose. They can be broken down into two categories: legume and grass. Grasses tend to be more easily established than legumes. However, legumes, such as clover and vetch, can actually add nitrogen to the soil. Below are some of the best cover crops for Kentucky gardens.

Cover Crops for Kentucky Gardens

Cover Crop	Time of Seeding	Grass or Legume	Pros	Cons	Seeding Rate per 1000 sq ft
Rye	Sept. - Nov.	Grass	Excellent cover, early spring growth	If not killed early enough in spring can lead to too much top growth	3-4 lbs
Wheat	Sept. - Oct.	Grass	Easy to manage	Not as hardy as rye	3 lbs
Annual Ryegrass	Aug. - Sept.	Grass	Produces good thick growth in fall	May die in cold weather	1 lb
Hairy Vetch	Aug. - Sept.	Legume	Easy to establish and winter hardy	May volunteer where it is not wanted	1 lb

Planting a cover crop is as easy as getting your garden ready for any other plant. As soon as you get room in your garden, remove the plant debris. This will help cut down on disease in the garden next year. Rake the area smooth. Broadcast the seed according to the rates on the seed bag. Lightly rake again and water the area with your hose or sprinkler with a light mist.

In spring, till or plow under the cover crop. You should do this at least three weeks before planting in order to allow time for the organic matter to decompose. If the cover crop has gotten too tall to turn under easily, mow first. Do not allow your cover to go to seed! This will only lead to weed problems.

Got Questions? We've Got Answers

- Soil Testing
 - Insect Identification
 - Plant Disease Diagnosis
 - Plant Identification
- For Horticulture questions, please contact me at 859-623-4072, or e-mail, amanda.sears@uky.edu.
You may also stop by and visit me at the Madison County Extension Center.