

Why should I plant cover crops?

Cover crops can increase yields and profits by:

- Keeping nutrients and soil on cropland by reducing water runoff and wind erosion.
- Returning nutrients to the soil as the cover crop decomposes.
- Preserving moisture by capturing and holding snow, reducing rain and snowmelt runoff, and improving water infiltration into the soil.
- Adding organic matter and increasing moisture-holding capacity.
- Improving soil biological activity and natural nutrient cycling.
- Increasing rooting depth by breaking up compaction.
- Preventing weeds and disrupting disease cycles.
- Earlier drying in spring, get on fields early.
- Providing opportunity to harvest forage crops.



Above: Growth of deep-rooting tillage radishes after soybeans prior to a killing frost.

Check with your county NRCS office and Soil and Water Conservation District for financial assistance programs.

What issues do I need to consider?

Manage cover crops to maximize benefits:

- Select appropriate varieties. Small grains and legumes have a long, successful track record.
- Legumes can add nitrogen before a corn crop. Clover reliably increases nitrogen and yields.
- Grasses and grains perform well before soybeans.
- Plant as soon as possible after harvest, or prior to harvest, to get an early start on growth. In soybeans, plant after sufficient senescence for good light penetration, but not so late that leaf drop will prevent good seed-to-soil contact.
- Terminate cover crops that don't winter kill before they compete with the crop.
- Experiment on a small scale with new varieties and techniques. Use test plots and check strips. Keep good records.
- Scout to assess stand and identify occasional problems, such as increases in slug populations.
- Be sure to monitor and comply with pre-harvest intervals for pesticide applications if the cover crop will be harvested for forage.
- Check crop insurance requirements. You may need permission before harvesting an alfalfa cover crop prior to planting a cash crop.
- Spread risk by using a variety of cover crop strategies each year rather than relying on a single strategy.

Where can I go for more information?

Midwest Cover Crops Council

<http://www.mccc.msu.edu>

Midwest Cover Crops Field Guide

<https://ag.purdue.edu/agry/dtc/Pages/CCFG.aspx>

Cover Crop Fundamentals - OSU Extension

<http://ohioline.osu.edu/agf-fact/0142.html>

Cornell University Cover Crop Decision Tool

<http://covercrops.cals.cornell.edu/index.php>