

# Cover Crops in Wisconsin



## Purpose

Cover crops may be used to reduce wind or water erosion by establishing cover after a minimal residue crop, to use up excess nutrients in the soil profile, for weed suppression, to provide nutrients for the next crop, to increase carbon sequestration and improve soil structure. Cover crops may be used on all lands needing vegetative cover for natural resource protection and improvement. They are an excellent tool for helping to improve soil health.

## Cover Crop Benefits

- Reduce soil erosion
- Improve soil health
- Increase soil porosity and infiltration
- Weed fighter
- Improve soil microbiology
- Produce/scavenge crop nutrients
- Reduce soil compaction
- Improve nutrient cycling
- Improve soil organic matter
- Protect water quality
- Protect the environment
- Enhance wildlife habitat

## Planting Tips

Cover crops can be seeded with drills, broadcast equipment, or aerially applied to get the seed started early enough to achieve desired results. Cover crops are ideal for planting after early harvested crops such as wheat, sweet corn, seed corn, peas or other vegetables and silage corn.

## Selecting Cover Crops

To get the maximum benefit from cover crops, they need to become an integral part of your cropping system. Whether you grow just corn and soybeans, or you have a more diverse rotation that includes wheat or vegetable crops, livestock and manure, there are opportunities to include cover crops in your production system. When you select a cover crop, make sure it provides benefits that meet your farming objectives.



*Mixing cover crops, like rye, clover, and vetch, combine weed control benefits of grasses with nitrogen production of legumes.*

## Additional Information

For more information about cover crops, such as cover species, seeding dates and seeding methods, visit your local USDA Service Center, or visit the Wisconsin NRCS website at [www.wi.nrcs.usda.gov](http://www.wi.nrcs.usda.gov).

## Overview

Cover crops are grasses, legumes, forbs or other herbaceous plants that are established for seasonal cover and conservation purposes.

Cover crops are planted in late summer or fall around harvest and before spring planting of the following year's crops. Common cover crops used in Wisconsin include winter hardy plants such as barley, rye and wheat. Other less common, but also effective cover crops include oats, spring wheat, hairy vetch, red clover, turnips, canola, radishes and triticale.

