

OSU EXTENSION

Planting Cover Crops

Healthy soils are the key to a productive garden. A healthy soil is rich in organic matter, active with microorganisms, and full of nutrients. The most effective way we can improve soil health is by adding organic matter to our gardens. Organic matter helps maintain the pH balance of the soil, adds nutrients, and improves soil structure.

Cover cropping is a sustainable way we can build, protect, and enrich soils. Cover crops are grown with the sole purpose of being turned back into the soil. After being incorporated into the soil, the decomposing plants add organic matter back into the soil, providing essential elements, improving nutrient availability, water holding capacity and soil structure.

Cover crops are divided into two categories: warm-season and cool-season, based on the optimum times to plant and grow. Warm-season types will not tolerate



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freezing temperatures and should be planted after danger of frost. Most take six to eight weeks to grow large enough to turn under. Cool-season cover crops will survive through the winter. They are planted in the fall, from mid-September until the end of October, and left over winter to provide protection from soil erosion.

Some recommended Cool Season Cover crops:

Legumes: Alfalfa, Arrowleaf Clover, Winter Peas, Crimson Clover, Hairy Vetch, Red & White Clover

Grasses: Barley, Oats, Ryegrass, Winter Wheat

For more information of planting and growing cover crops, contact your local OSU Extension Office.

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