

Benefits of Cover Crops

Cover crops have some great benefits for your soil and are not just for large farms. They can be used in the backyard garden, including raised beds and containers.

Sow cover crops 4 to 6 weeks before your first hard frost date. Scatter the seed by hand or with a seed spreader over the soil, being sure the soil is damp and seeds are kept moist until they sprout. Let them grow all winter. You may notice the cover crops doesn't grow as fast after the first hard frost and picks back up again once it starts to warm up in the early spring or late winter.

Cover crop benefits:

1. Reduce erosion
2. Reduce soil compaction
3. Reduce weeds by covering the bare soil
4. Increase organic matter
5. Increase nitrogen and other nutrients based on specific cover crop

Make sure you choose annual varieties of cover crops when it comes to grass crops like rye.

Common cover crop options:

- annual rye grass (this has a long root for breaking up hard soil and also germinates rather fast and also helps reduce nitrogen loss over winter months)
- buckwheat
- clover (helps increase nitrogen in your soil)
- oats
- hairy vetch (hairy vetch is actually part of the legume family and will help fix nitrogen back in to the soil)
- radish (a common choice for compact or hard soil)

In the spring, mow down your cover crop and allow it to dry out for a few days before tilling or hoeing it back into the dirt.