

Sowing & Growing: Small White Clover



White clover (*trifolium repens*) is one of the most common legumes in the UK. This species can be recognised by its creeping growth habit on stolons or surface runners.

Generally it is used in long term grazing swards as a component to fill the very base of the sward with its prostrate growth habit. Experimental work has also looked at using

this low growing clover for undersowing, to act as a weed suppressor for perennial crops like christmas trees as a living mulch.

The small leaf type is the lowest growing and least aggressive white clover, as well as being the longest lasting. Small leaf types can be added to lawn mixtures and other pathway areas and will tolerate regular close mowing.

Some veg growers have experimented with planting cash crops like kale into a small leaf white clover mat which may be left in place for several years at a time.

Small leaved varieties are sometimes called 'wild white clover'. Two common varieties are the Aberystwyth S184 and Kent wild white clover. A more modern variety is Aberace. Small leaf varieties can tolerate close mowing, heavy foot traffic and close livestock grazing.

When to Sow: Legumes need to be sown into warm soils. Sowing from late April to early September is recommended.

Sowing Rate: 1 g/m² - 4kg per acre - 10kg per ha.

Preparation: The most successful results come from sowing into a newly prepared seedbed. Aim to cultivate the top soil to about 5cm, with a light cultivator or discs. The finished seedbed should be fine but firm, with no clods. Several passes with a cultivator may be needed to achieve this.

Sowing: When clover seed is sown, either as a component of a mixture or a pure stand, the depth of sowing is critical. The seed should be sown no deeper than 10mm. Sowing too deeply can reduce the germination and establishment dramatically.

Management: Small leaved white clover can be mown regularly to keep the plant height low. It can be difficult to terminate with a total herbicide application and may need inverting to kill it off completely.