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Green Manures

A green manure is a crop grown to improve the soil. Although they may generate a profit, in most cases their sole purpose is to benefit subsequent crops. Once grown they are usually incorporated into the soil shortly before sowing the net cash crop.

With rising nitrogen fertiliser prices and an ever-increasing requirement to farm in an environmentally sustainable way, green manures are fast becoming a viable way to cut input costs, add fertility and improve the soil.

There is a wide variety of green manures to choose from, including clovers, medicks, brassicas and grasses. Legumes (such as clover) are very popular as they fix nitrogen. However other species offer benefits such as improved soil structure and weed suppression.

Green manures can be grown for widely different periods to suit particular needs. These can vary from six weeks, for a short break in an intensive vegetable rotation, to many years as a grass ley.

Green manures will have many different benefits - from long term nitrogen enhancement to improving soil structure and blackgrass control - but no one species will offer all of these. Grown as a single species, or in mixtures, the right choice of green manure depends on the aims and circumstances of each individual farmer or grower.

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