

Cover Crops: Sowing & Growing



Suitable soils and optimum pH

These will grow on most soil types with a pH above 5.6.

When to sow

Sow mixtures containing legumes in to warm soil between May and August. Autumn Sown Cover mixes should be sown as soon as possible after harvest or into a standing crop before harvest and definitely by mid September.

How to sow

Mixes can be broadcast or direct drilled into stubble at a maximum of 10mm. Ideally, into warm soils when rain is imminent.

Management

Summer crops can be ready for incorporation after 8-10 weeks normally at the onset of flowering, before sowing a winter cereal. Winter cover crops can be terminated and incorporated in early spring. Westerwolds ryegrass will regrow after cutting so can be left through the summer for further cutting or mulching. To minimise the risk of ryegrass seed being shed, it is best to cut before the seed heads are visible.

On heavier soils it may be beneficial to terminate winter cover crops early in the spring to allow soils to dry out and biomass to breakdown before spring drilling.

Yield potential

The amount of N fixed by legumes is dependent on the success of the green manure. It is generally accepted that a reasonable crop can fix in excess of 100kg N/ha from a spring or summer sowing. Legumes only fix nitrogen in warm conditions. Overwinter cover crops such as westerwolds, Rye or Brassicas will collect N from the soil.