



## COVER CROPS

Cover crops are fast-growing plants that are used to reduce soil erosion, to prevent weed growth, and as green manures when incorporated into the soil. Cover crops tie up the nutrients in the soil, preventing their loss to leaching and general deterioration. The more your garden area is kept green, the less the nutrient loss between crops and between seasons. Green manures that have grown vigorously will be high in nitrogen and other nutrients and will decompose in only a few weeks when incorporated back into the soil.

Cover crops can be divided into two categories: **legumes**, which have nitrogen-fixing capability in their roots and **non-legumes**. Cover crops vary with climate and desired time of planting and soil incorporation. Usually cover crop seeds are sown at a high rate in order to produce a large volume of plant material in a short time. This provides a dense cover and large amounts of green manure.

The following chart provides information about cover crops/green manures that can be purchased and grown in the Inland Northwest. Seeding rates, when to plant, when to turn under, and special instructions and comments are included. All these seeds can be broadcast planted and lightly covered with rake or tiller.

A good cover crop/green manure sequence to bring soil into optimum condition for production would be Austrian winter peas planted in April; buckwheat in June and again in late July; winter rye in September. The area would be ready for a crop the next spring.

CROP	SEEDING RATE	WHEN TO PLANT	WHEN TO TURN UNDER	SPECIAL INSTRUCTIONS/ COMMENTS
AUSTRIAN PEAS <i>Lathyrus hirsutus</i>	3 lb/1000 sq. ft.	Spring	Early Summer	Legume. Will germinate in cool soils. Not winter hardy. Can be moved.
BUCKWHEAT <i>Fagopyrum esculentum</i>	2-3 lb/000 sq. ft.	Spring/Summer	Before bloom or as it begins to bloom.	Grows rapidly. Can be turned under after only six weeks
WHITE CLOVER <i>Trifolium spp.</i>	½ -1 lb/1000 sq. ft.	Spring	Pre-bloom, 4-6 inches	Legume. Chokes out weeds. Can be mowed.
WINTER RYE <i>Secale sp.</i>	2-4 lb/1000 sq. ft.	Midsummer through September	Turn under the following spring.	Allow two weeks after turning under for decomposition before planting area.
ALFALFA <i>Medicago sativa</i>	½-1 lb/1000 sq. ft.	Spring	Prebloom, 4-6 inches	Legume. Needs inoculant (increases nitrogen-fixing capacity). Can be hard to eliminate if left too long.

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