



Building and Enriching Soil With Cover Crops

Planting cover crops is an easy and inexpensive way to improve your soil when your garden would otherwise be at rest, with nothing in it. You can read all about the benefits of cover crops at: <https://www.rainbowgardens.biz/news-events/cover-crops-soil-building-vegetable-gardens/>

You can plant cover crops at most any time of the year, but fall cover crop planting is perhaps the most important and beneficial for improving soil in spring vegetable gardens

Steps for Planting Cover Crops

1. Purchase seed packets of cover crops, or purchase cover crops by the pound.

Rainbow Gardens generally carries cover crops like crimson clover, oats and peas, buckwheat, etc... in packets by Botanical Interest, and Elbon Rye by the pound.

2. Purchase enough cover crops to heavily seed your area.

Generally you want about $\frac{1}{4}$ of a pound to cover 100 sq. ft. of planting area. This allows for your cover crops to form a nice, dense mat.

3. Make sure your soil starts clean and free of weeds, and for the best start, it's a good idea to amend it by tilling in a couple of inches of compost.

4. Broadcast your seeds over the soil, lightly rake seeds in and water thoroughly.

5. The only thing you really need to do while your cover crops are growing is make sure that they receive water consistently if there is no rain.

6. Allow cover crops to grow for 8 weeks to 6 months

Length of grow time depends on which cover crops you have planted and when you are planning to plant in that area again. Always do your research and read your cover crops seed packets for information.

Steps for Turning Cover Crops

Tip: Give yourself 3 – 4 weeks between turning crops over and planting in the area to allow the vegetative growth to decompose.

1. Turn your cover crops before they set seed.

This will break your heart to turn your crops when they most likely have beautiful flowers but remember you are offering your soil the largest amount of nitrogen and organic matter that these cover crops can produce at this time.

2. Turning cover crops under in large planting areas:

If you've planted cover crops on the ground to cover a large area, you can simply mow the cover crops with your lawn mower.

Do not bag the mowing. Leave the cover crops behind on the ground.

In a few days, after the leaves and stems of the mowed cover crops have dried, and then gently dig them into the soil beneath.

3. Turning cover crops under in garden beds:

You can use a weed trimmer, hedge shearers or hand pruners to cut the plants down to the soil level.

If your cover crops are somewhat long, you can make additional cuts to the stems, cutting them in half or quarters, and leave them on top of the soil to dry for a few days.

Once the stems have dried a few days, gently dig the stems and leaves of the cover crops into the soil. Do not over till.

4. Wait 3-4 weeks after turning cover crops into the soil to plant in the area.

5. Enjoy the fruits of your easy labor and watch your spring vegetable gardens thrive!