

Cover Crops Do's & Don't's

*Uncovering cover crop facts
and myths about weed, insect,
and disease management.*



Find Out More

This publication was developed by the Crop Protection Network, a multi-state and international collaboration of university/provincial extension specialists and public/private professionals that provides unbiased, research-based information to farmers and agricultural personnel. Learn more at cropprotectionnetwork.org.

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Cover Crops Do's & Don't's

Weed Management



DO TERMINATE COVER CROPS BEFORE PLANTING

Once the field crop emerges, your options for using herbicides to terminate the cover crop are much more limited.

DO CHOOSE THE RIGHT COVER CROP

Choose a cover crop that will suit your needs, and avoid covers that may be too difficult to terminate, or that are contaminated with weed seeds.



DON'T REDUCE HERBICIDE USE

Always use preemergence residual herbicides that have multiple sites of action. Apply at full rates since cover crop residues can reduce the amount of herbicide that reaches the soil. And be aware that residual herbicides can interfere with cover crop establishment and may have restrictions (such as grazing).

DON'T RELY ON COVER CROPS FOR UNIVERSAL WEED SUPPRESSION

A well-established cereal rye cover crop can suppress 60-80 percent of some specific weeds. But the ability of other cover crops to suppress weeds is extremely variable.



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Insect Management

DO COMMIT TO SCOUTING

Cover crops are more attractive to insects of all types (including pests) than bare, tilled ground or even sparse weed cover.

DON'T TREAT UNNECESSARILY

Cover crops attract many beneficial insects. Don't harm those beneficials with an unnecessary insecticide application.

DON'T PLANT IMMEDIATELY AFTER TERMINATING THE COVER CROP

Displaced insects will be hungry. Even insects that don't normally feed on your corn, soybean, or other crops will attempt to do so!

DO WAIT 10–14 DAYS AFTER COVER CROP HAS DIED

Waiting to plant ensures that you starve the pest insects that require large amounts of food daily — especially caterpillars like armyworms and black cutworms — before the crop emerges.



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Disease Management



DON'T RELY SOLELY ON COVER CROPS TO REDUCE DISEASES

Cover crops can be hosts for *both* beneficial organisms and organisms that cause disease, including nematodes. Cover crops can also affect the soil microenvironment, and we don't know how this affects specific diseases.

DON'T PLANT IMMEDIATELY AFTER TERMINATING THE COVER CROP

Cover crops may be a green bridge that can increase seedling pathogen and virus populations. After terminating the cover crop, wait 10-14 days to decrease these populations and reduce disease risk.



DO USE MULTIPLE MANAGEMENT PRACTICES

Disease management in cover crops requires an integrated approach using resistant varieties/hybrids, crop rotation, residue management, and fungicides where needed.