

COVER CROPS FOR YOUR VEGETABLE GARDEN.

We will go over the plentiful benefits of them and how they do it.

4, August, 2020

WHAT ARE COVER CROPS

Cover crops are used in conjunction with vegetable plants. They are used either to intercrop vegetable plants or in rotation with them to cover bare soil.

These cover crops are not harvested, they serve a purpose to the soil. They have so many great benefits that we will talk about.

Before you can plant in the soil again, you need to cut back the current cover crop- NOT dig it out. You leave the roots in and when you cut or mow them down leave them on the soil as a mulch.

(cover crop phacelia in picture, great for clay soils, the bees and stunning flowers)



WHY WOULD YOU WANT TO USE THEM

When you decide to sow some seeds of a cover crop, also called green manure. You are deciding to sow the seeds of a plant that will transform your soil all with you not having to buy expensive topsoil, compost, fertilizers all the time. These cover crops have amazing capabilities. Here is a list of what they can do for you.

- *Suppress weeds !*
- *More nitrogen in your soil- and stop that nitrogen leaching away over winter-when you risk losing 70 % of your nitrogen !(clover, in picture, a good summer legume cover crop for fixing nitrogen)*
- *More organic matter*
- *Improving your gardens biodiversity.*
- *Giving your soil better fauna, thats healthy and more active*
- *All the more vegetables for you to enjoy from your plants. With less effort,how ?*



HOW DO THEY DO IT ! HOW DO THEY WORK ?

As they do all these wonderful things and more you may be wondering how they do it, or you may just be content knowing that they do it for you anyway.

The roots of cover crops are fibrous, that is, they spread along the soil and hold onto soil particles keeping them together. This stops bad things happening in your soil like leaching and compaction- it keeps air in your soil and helps hold onto water and nutrients. In fact, it has been shown soils without cover crops can lose 4 times more water and nutrients. Soils that don't have a cover crop over winter and are left bare can lose up to 70% of their nitrogen and other nutrients (rye grass, in picture, is a very good over winter or long term cover crop)



There are a very special class of cover crops- legume cover crops. These amazing roots have nodules in them. (have you ever looked at pea or bean roots, and seen the growths off them ? that's the nodules) these take up nitrogen in the air and put it into the plant which bacteria release to the soil.

When you cut them back once they are finished with, you leave the roots in the soil and leave the leafy bits as a mulch. This is because it keeps the soil fauna-bacteria, fungi, worms etc. stimulated. When they are stimulated it helps them break roots down, and so release all the nutrients they had stored in the roots, stems etc. increasing organic matter and the structure of your soil.



If you want to see what types of cover crops/green manure there are and how to use them in your garden then [click here](#) for the next part.

[Want to chat with us, learn more about plants ? contact us](mailto:CardenEden@orevalleyha.org.uk)
CardenEden@orevalleyha.org.uk