

Cover Crops

COVER UP!

Now it is autumn we can start to plan for next years planting season. If our vegetables have grown well this year and produced a great crop of flavour then we need to be able to sustain this. Our soil is the source of our nutrients and needs time to rest and replenish over the autumn and winter season.

Maybe you already know about the benefits of cover crops but think they're just for farmers and other large-scale growers. Think again. Cover crops are well suited to all gardens, whether they're big or small. Cover crops are used when a boost to the soil is wanted by a natural healthy means. They add nitrogen back into the soil and help prevent erosion. once they are tilled into the soil, they also provide good food for garden worms which are great for natural aeration. Cover crops just might be the hardest-working plants you'll ever grow. Cover crops (also called green manure) suppress weeds, build productive soil, and help control pests and diseases. plus, cover crops are easy to plant and require only basic care to thrive.

THE RIGHT CROP FOR YOUR GARDEN

If you have not used a cover crop before then you should choose to use the legume and rye mix. The legumes are nitrogen fixers and so will gently replace the nitrogen taken by the previous year's crop. The rye is a good easy to care for plant that will help preserve the soil structure.

If you have used a cover crop or regularly use manure in the vegetable garden the winter rye crop would be the best choice. This is because we want to preserve the nutrients in the soil and also keep the soils in place.

HOW TO USE A COVER CROP

Chose the area you wish to rejuvenate. This is most probably the area that your vegetables are going to be planted next year. Gently till up the soil and using a shovel or a garden rake, make sure the ground is flat and ready for seeding.

Remove any large boulders prior to tilling. Sprinkle evenly your choice of cover crop over the soil. Be careful how much seeds you throw over the dirt as too many will crowd the soil and they will grow slower as they will be fighting for nutrients and space. Using a rake again, go over the top of the soil to gently incorporate the seeds. Water the ground, especially when it is a dry day.

Let the crop mature and grow watering when needed until the plants have grown but not yet reached the flowering stage. Usually this is in Mid February in the Lower Mainland. After this, use a shove and work the entire crop into the soil. allow the greens to become fully covered by soil. The green leaves will now decay into a good green manure resulting in a soil that is rich in nutrients. You should let the soil then mature and rest for about 3 weeks before you start to plant allowing the nutrients to fully mature in the soil.

Happy gardening!