

# Wildlife Friendly Cover Crops

Cover crops can improve soil health, erosion control and wildlife forage.

12/8/2014

*Choosing wildlife friendly cover crops can attract and hold wildlife on your land from fall to late winter while at the same time adding much needed nutrients to your soil for next season's crop.*

## Definition:

A wildlife friendly cover crop is an annual or perennial planting of grain, grass or legumes to provide food for a variety of wildlife on agricultural land after or between cash crops.



Cover crops broadcast seeded into standing corn at 4-6 leaf stage

## Uses of wildlife friendly cover crops:

A wildlife friendly cover crop adds plant diversity, food and cover to the landscape as well as being agronomically sound for erosion control or other purposes related to conservation or soil improvement. It can also be considered where land is planned to provide a winter or early spring food source for wildlife.

## Benefits:

- Mixes that include turnip, radish, or sugar beets, provide food, first as leaf, then as an edible bulb.
- Can relieve wildlife pressure on commercial crops.
- Fewer inputs than a conventional food plot.
- They improve soil organic matter
- Many mixes can be planted in summer or even as late as early fall.
- Shorter period to maturity, and need less rain than a corn food plot.
- Great for erosion control

## Seeding Methods:

**Aerial**—Typically done into standing crops.

**Drill**—Typically done after crop is harvested or in a split row or narrow row cropping system.

**Broadcast**— Can be used in most cropping systems. This method works well into standing corn in the 4-6 leaf stage or after crop is harvested.

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## **Establishment:**

Seeding dates are especially critical to allow for adequate growth to provide the intended benefit.



Turnips are excellent scavengers of nitrogen and excellent soils builders

## **Timing of establishment:**

### **Prior to Harvest**

If seeding prior to harvest (prior to leaf drop and/or near crop maturity), broadcast seed using a method allowing good coverage and for fewer damages to the standing crop. These methods would include seeding by air or high clearance applicator. No seedbed preparation is necessary. When broadcast seeding prior to harvest it is important to have good soil moisture near the surface.

## **After Harvest**

If seeding after harvest, seed may be either no-till planted or broadcast seeded into existing residue cover. Immediately roll or cultipack if the seed is broadcast on a prepared seedbed to ensure good seed-to-soil contact. Some producers mix seed in the fertilizer application to reduce the number of trips over the field.

## **Wildlife Friendly Mixes:**

30% Annual Ryegrass, 20% Crimson Clover, 20% Cover Crop Radish, 20% Turnip, 10% Dwarf Essex Rape.

**Drilled Seeding Rate:** 10lbs/acre

**Planting Depth:** 1/2 inch

**Aerial & Broadcast Seed Rate:** 15lbs/acre

**Approx. Planting Date:** June 10—20,  
Aug. 15—Sept. 15

30% Cover Crop Radish, 20% Annual Ryegrass, 15% Common Vetch, 15% Crimson Clover, 15% Lentil, 5% Sunnhemp.

**Drilled Seeding Rate:** 17lbs/acres

**Planting Depth:** 1/2 inch

**Aerial & Broadcast Seeding Rate:** 25lbs/acre

**Approx. Planting Date:** June 10—20,  
Aug. 15—Sept. 15

Create your own custom mix at: [Midwest Cover Crop Council](#)