

6 Cover Crops Your Cows Can Graze This Fall and Winter

by:- Sara Brown



After a year of [drought](#) and weather challenges, some cattle farmers are putting in extra cover crops this fall to ease the forage burden. Here's the top six cover crops Midwest cattle farmers are using to stretch fall and winter grazing.

Cereal grass

Cereal rye is one of the top cover crops used in the U.S. for both [agronomic](#) and grazing. It is popular because it is cold-hardy and can be planted later in fall than other crops, and it provides excellent erosion control and incredible growth in spring. It's also easy to graze. The key is to know exactly the goal you want to accomplish. How long do you need to graze it, and what is your crop plan for that field in the [spring](#)? A potential drawback is that when rye is used on poorly drained soils that stay cool and wet in the spring, such as claypan soils, the decaying rye can sometimes slow corn establishment. Another caution is that the rapid spring growth of rye can take first-time users by surprise and create a slight risk of complications with spring planting. In many cases, even 5'-tall rye can be killed with glyphosate or by rolling.

Come see these cows grazing covers crops after wheat crop on October 25th in Omemee area with [@Adam4Bent](#) and [@Shea_8](#)

Talk to [@OREilly_Ag](#) for more info. [@OntarioBeef](#) [@GrainFarmers](#) [#ontag](#)
<https://t.co/ciwuNhBF54>

— Adam Shea (@FarmingForYou) [September 24, 2018](#)

Annual ryegrass

Annual ryegrass is a completely different plant than cereal rye, with fine blades and smaller stature more like a turfgrass (ryegrass is often sold in turf mixes). Annual ryegrass is fast-growing and easier to establish by broadcast seeding than other grass cover crops. It needs to be planted earlier than cereal rye to get good fall cover. Ryegrass is conducive to interseeding applications in corn or soybean as it is relatively shade-tolerant. Annual ryegrass turns brown over the winter, but depending on planting date, location and winter conditions, will generally regrow in the spring. Where it does overwinter, [timely herbicide application](#) in spring is needed to terminate it. Use of a cover crop-specific variety will make spring termination easier. Annual ryegrass makes a good forage and, as a cover crop, is known for rooting deeply in the soil and providing good erosion control.

We are very excited to welcome these pairs to the Fairview Research Farm! These gals will be grazing some standing cocktail Cover crops and some swath grazing. We will be measuring the nutrient benefit in a grain cropping system! pic.twitter.com/PBMgGnlkx

— PCBFA (@PCBFA) [September 18, 2018](#)

Radishes

Oilseed radishes have become a [popular cover crop](#) due to their rapid fall growth, deep [taproot](#), good fall soil coverage (if planted early enough). Radishes normally winterkill in Missouri. They establish relatively easily when broadcast seeded, which is good because radishes often need to be aerial seeded in late August or early September to achieve adequate fall growth. Review the residual herbicides applied to the preceding commodity crop to make sure none will affect radish establishment.

Cover crops of fodder radish and mustard planted straight into S wheat stubble with Guttler Supermax. Might come in useful for some winter grazing as a result of [#drought18](#) [#organic](#) [#COGs](#) pic.twitter.com/gk6d4ar5pA

— Macaroni Farm (@MacaroniOrganic) [August 10, 2018](#)

Forage Turnips

Like radishes, forage turnips are a member of the Brassica family that does best if planted in early fall. Although not as vigorous in growth as some oilseed radish varieties, turnips are superior for grazing. Both the leafy top-growth and the [tuber are good forage](#). Turnip top-growth typically dies by late December. Turnips are often [mixed](#) with another forage species, such as cereal grass.

Teaching the little one about turnips and enjoying the cattle grazing our cover crops.

pic.twitter.com/dDVH0COd3m

— Michelle Karls-braaten (@karlsbraaten) [August 17, 2018](#)

Oats

Widely available and normally spring-planted for [grain](#), oats have the advantage of strong fall growth as a cover crop. Many first-time users of cover crops appreciate that [oats](#) will winterkill and require no special management

in spring. However, the erosion control provided by oats in late winter and spring is less than that from overwintering cereals such as cereal rye, triticale and wheat.

Considering planting annual forages/cover crops for some fall forage? This is a mixture of rye and oats (left plot) and rye and turnips (right plot) in late September. Planting was in mid-August. [#beef #grazing https://t.co/Hb5PN2JFQH pic.twitter.com/nTzzBFAXi8](#)

— UNL Beef Extension (@UNLBeef) [August 3, 2018](#)

Triticale

A cross between wheat and cereal rye, triticale has some of the hardiness of rye but the shorter stature of wheat. Considered a good cover for erosion control and for [grazing](#), it works well in [combination with other cover crops](#), particularly legumes.

Check out these full season cover crops planted the middle/end of June! [@MHoenhause @ResslerLuke](#) read more about grazing [#covercrops https://t.co/PifKHY5Pru pic.twitter.com/u4IGnMvClz](#)

— Abbey Wick (@NDSUsoilhealth) [August 6, 2018](#)

Are your cows munching on clover or turnips this fall? Find more information about [cover crop mixes and suggested seeding rates](#) and read these common [Q&A about covers](#).

Send me a note what mix is working well for your forage needs this year, and any tips you're willing to share in future articles, by emailing sbrown@farmjournal.com.