

GREEN CROPS



A green crop is a quick growing plant sown thickly on vacant ground or within a vegetable rotation and then dug into the top soil. With in the soil it breaks down to humus and releases nutrients.

In the garden the green crop is usually planted in late autumn, grows through the winter and is dug-in in the spring. It is most important that it is still soft and watery when dug-in otherwise it is broken down with difficulty in the soil. After digging-in it is best to have a delay of up to three weeks before planting the next crop. If space or time is at a premium the green crop may be better harvested then composted or left as a mulch to allow immediate planting of the crop to follow.

The green crop has several functions:

- As a protective cover for the soil
- To gather nutrients for use by crops to follow
- Maintenance of humus levels
- Roots preserve soil structure
- Shelter and a food source fro predators.



SOME USEFUL GREEN CROPS:

Legumes:

These are very important for the maintenance of fertility. They add nitrogen to the soil. Lupins are one of the best nitrogen fixers and their deep roots gather nutrients from the subsoil.

Broad beans can be left for a crop but the stems become woody.

Lucerne, Clover, Comfrey are useful as permanent stands harvested for green manure or composting. The first two being legumes will replace nitrogen removed from the soil. Lucerne and comfrey have roots that penetrate 3m or more into the subsoil. Thus nutrients gathered from the subsoil will replenish the top soil.

Winter Cereals:

These can produce a large bulk of growth through the winter but if left quickly become woody. The strong root system improves soil structure.

Annual Grasses:

Similar to winter cereals but generally produce less growth in winter.

Weeds:

Many weeds have strong, deep root systems which improve soil structure and gather, nutrients from the subsoil. However, the seeds left in the soil after digging-in are likely to cause problems for the following crop.