



# Oats as a Cover Crop

Oats grow quickly in cool weather and are an excellent choice to fill in a rotation when a spring or fall cover crop is needed. Oats can be taken for forage or plowed under for green manure. They are an excellent pre-summer weed suppressor.

Oats are also a universal nurse crop and can be planted with slower growing perennial legumes (clovers, alfalfa) or brassicas to shelter them from frost damage and suppress competitive weeds.

Oats can also quickly scavenge soil nitrates and recycle nutrients before the later-planted winter annuals can get in the ground. Oats mature in about 60 days, and they can protect soil and prevent erosion in the short inter-crop windows they fill.

They may prove especially valuable as a winterlong cover. Oats winterkill with the onset of hard frosts, and the thick residue they leave provides an excellent soil-protecting mulch and insulator if planted with an overwintering crop like alfalfa. If early spring crops are to be planted, the cover crop is already dead and can be no-till planted into or turned under. This makes oats a more flexible option in many rotations.

Any variety of oats can work as a cover crop. See <http://www.kingsagriseeds.com/cool-season-annuals/> for a complete list of oats products and mixtures with oats.

## Soil Adaptation

Excellent for late-season nutrient management but apply manure prior to seeding.

Wet – Poor because harvest will be very difficult.

Drought – Fair. Productive during fall or spring, which tends to reduce drought risk.

pH Range –6.0 and higher.

## Forage Management

Cut for baleage or graze prior to boot stage for optimal forage quality.

## At A Glance

Quick cool weather weed suppression, nitrogen catcher, and soil builder

## Establishment

**Planting Dates:** Seed 4 to 6 weeks prior to the beginning of wheat seeding in fall, or as soon as ground can be worked in the spring

**Seeding Rate:** 80-100 lbs/A  
Large seed box required.

**Depth:** 1" - 1 1/2"

**Speed:** Rapid



Winter-killed oats provide excellent ground cover all winter, even after deep freezes kill them.



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High Energy Forages and Soil Building Cover Crops