

Management of red clover as a cover crop

Consider the following management tips for red clover, one of the most widely used cover crops. Posted on **December 15, 2014** by **Christina Curell** (http://msue.anr.msu.edu/experts/christina_curell), Michigan State University Extension

[Red cover \(/news/benefits_of_using_red_clover_as_a_cover_crop\)](#)'s high adaptability and biomass yield makes it one of the most ideal candidates for [cover crops \(http://www.mccc.msu.edu/\)](http://www.mccc.msu.edu/) across the United States and world. It has average nitrogen production and offers a good ground cover. It should be used in rotation or simultaneously with corn, oats and soybeans.

Establishment

Red clover establishes well in cool climates and can grow in almost any soil type. It germinates very quickly, but is a slower growth clover. For this reason, it is recommended to sow it when there is another crop present or a residue of another crop. For example, sow red clover with a rye-grass to keep soil from drying out while the red establishes.

Seeding

Red clover can be over seeded into dormant winter grains, summer annuals, corn and after a wheat harvest at 10-12 pounds per acre. In general, it should be drilled at 8-12 pounds per acre, broadcasted at 9-13 pounds per acre and aerial applied at 9.5-14 pounds per acre.

Killing

Red clover should be killed at about mid-bloom of its second season. It can be terminated mechanically by being chopped or mowed any time after blooming starts.

Medium red clover

Also known as multi-cut clover, medium red clover should be cut once late in the seeding year and twice the following year. Use it as hay or grazing in the second season for maximum nitrogen production.

Mammoth red clover

Mammoth clover produces a large amount of biomass and nitrogen in the first cutting, but less in later cuttings. Use this single cut clover for a single year all over the clover field.

Rotations

Red clover works well in a rotation between two non-leguminous crops. It is found that it can be used to support continuous corn growth without commercial fertilizer.

For more information on red clover, see “[Benefits of using red clover as a cover crop \(/news/benefits_of_using_red_clover_as_a_cover_crop\)](#).”

[Michigan State University Extension \(/\)](#) educators have developed fact sheets and pamphlets that will help you determine the best clover for your management needs. For more information on using cover crops or to request copies of the fact sheets, contact Christina Curell at curellc@anr.msu.edu (<mailto:curellc@anr.msu.edu>) or Paul Gross at grossp@anr.msu.edu (<mailto:grossp@anr.msu.edu>).

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