

Cover Crops and Compost Crops for No-Till Gardening

Approximate plant and harvest times are for zone 7

Suggestions for Fall Planting

Plant cereal rye (looks like wheat seed, not grass seed)

- Plant where you want to cut it at pollen shed (about first week in May) to lie down as mulch. Transplant into stubble two weeks later.
- Plant where you want to let it grow to maturity and harvest the seed (about mid-June). Transplant or seed the next crop into the stubble. The rye straw may go into the compost or back on the bed as mulch.

You may add Austrian winter peas or hairy vetch to the rye, but not too much.

Plant winter wheat

- Manage the same as rye. Rye will provide more biomass than wheat, but you may prefer to grow out wheat for the seed.

Plant Austrian winter peas or crimson clover

- Where you want a legume crop preceding the next crop
- Where you want to have a bed ready to transplant into in mid-late April. Cut the winter pea or clover crop at flowering and leave it lie for two weeks before transplanting into it. Or remove the biomass at harvest and use for compost material, allowing you to immediately plant the next crop.

Plant oats

- Where you want to plant the next crop in early March. The oats will winterkill, **unless** the winter is unusually mild or the crop is planted in a protected place.

Suggestions for Spring Planting

Plant field peas—seen in the seed catalogs as sweet field peas or Canadian field peas.

- Plant in early March and manage as for Austrian winter peas.

Plant oats or spring wheat

- Plant in early March and manage as for cereal rye.

Suggestions for Summer Planting:

Plant buckwheat

- Where you want something to fill the bed for about 30 days between main crops. It will be flowering then. Pull it out and put it in the compost. Buckwheat doesn't provide much biomass, but its flowers attract many beneficial insects.

Plant cowpeas

- Where you want a legume as a preceding crop. It does best when the soil has thoroughly warmed up, so it is a good choice after the wheat and rye harvest in June. If growing for biomass for the compost pile, pull it out at flowering. If you cut it, it may grow back. In about 80 days from planting it will have produced dry seed.