

Cover Crop Update

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How hardy are cover crops? Looks like this year we can find out. As of the end of December, all the varieties looked good. The really cold weather almost waited for the snow cover, and that will help a great deal as

temperatures hit zero.

The late July-planted hairy vetch was measured and evaluated at the Upton farm at Springerton, Illinois in late December. Growth was over 3 feet, and the fields were uniform heavy vegetation. The vetch was weighed and evaluated: The vetch planted the third week of July produced 209 pounds nitrogen per acre, and vetch planted the fourth week of July produced 168 pounds nitrogen per acre. These fields had annual ryegrass seeded with the vetch, which was visible in November but hard to find in December.

How will the big vetch survive this weather? Good question. I will be monitoring it and then checking how the nitrogen makes it to spring and affects the corn crop. The idea was that the weather would probably kill the vetch, and the annual ryegrass would hold the nitrogen until spring when it

would be killed, and the no-till corn planted. What we did find out was that, yes, you can plant vetch in July, and it does grow well and does produce a good amount of nitrogen. This system may interest farmers farther north, where they do not double crop wheat.

The mid-September aerial seeded hairy vetch in corn was variable, with most fields 6 to 8 inches tall by December. The aerial seeded vetch in a soybean field had vetch 4 to 6 inches tall when the soybeans were harvested in November. That surprisingly didn't cause any harvest problems, and the vetch looks good now.

The crimson clover plots seeded in standing soybeans look very good, but growth is hard to measure since there were 19 deer recently grazing them. Deer prefer the crimson clover over the other legume varieties.

The radishes have all winter killed with root development less than 6 inches. The early September planted cereal rye rooting depth averages 10 to 12 inches, while the annual ryegrass ranges from 18 to 24 inches, depending on the variety.

If you have questions, feel free to contact me by email at plumerm@illinois.edu. Δ

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