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### **Cover Crops in the Garden**

After your garden is done producing for the summer, you do not have to let the soil stay bare for the winter. Cover crops are grown for many benefits including improving soil quality, reducing weeds and erosion and sometimes promoting the garden ecosystem by providing food sources for pollinators. They are typically not grown for their harvest as the primary benefit. The best cover crop for your garden depends on the purpose, planting time and planned method of terminating the crop. Small grains such as wheat should be seeded from mid- September to late October at a rate of 3/4 to 1 pound of seed per 1,000 square feet. Spring oats can also be seeded until mid-September, but the rate should be 2 to 4 pounds per 1,000 square feet. Spring oats will die back in the winter and can be tilled under in the spring. Daikon radishes are another good cover crop because the large taproot penetrates the hardpan. After the radishes die back in the winter, the loosened soil is better able to retain water.

Hairy vetch, alfalfa and sweet clover are legumes which means they fix nitrogen. Seed these cover crops at a rate of ¼ to ½ pound of seed per 1,000 square feet of garden. Hairy vetch and alfalfa can be seeded from mid-August to late September while sweet clover should be seeded only until early September. Visit the [Kansas Garden Guide](#) for more cover crop recommendations for home gardeners.