

MSU Agriculture Innovation Day

Focus on Fruit and Vegetable Technologies

Making Cover Crops a Priority

Cover crop choices should be guided by two key questions:

1) What is your management goal?

Cover crops can be divided into different “functional groups” based on:
 Their primary purpose (e.g. N-fixer, biofumigant, soil organic matter builder, weed suppressor)

Their period of optimal growth (e.g. cool season, warm season).

2) What is your planting window?

The Midwest Cover Crop Council’s online cover crop selector tool (<http://mccc.msu.edu/selector-tool/>) helps growers select the most appropriate cover crops given their goals and planting windows.

Windows of opportunity for planting cover crops (yellow boxes) in vegetable crop rotations (green boxes) range from very narrow (window 1: late-harvested cash crops followed by early planted vegetables) to very wide (window 9: multi-year fallow).

This year												Next year											
Spring			Summer			Fall			Winter			Spring			Summer			Fall			Winter		
M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D	J	F
Late Harvested						Window 1						Early Planted											
						Window 2						Late Planted											
						Window 3																	
						Window 4						Early Planted											
						Window 5						Late Planted											
						Window 6																	
						Window 7						Early Planted											
						Window 8						Late Planted											
						Window 9																	

Segregated planting of a mixture of oilseed radish and oats. Tractor guidance systems and precision planters allow targeted placement of cover crops that may improve their performance.



