

Early established cover crops will provide green cover and a well-developed rooting system which will protect the soil over winter. This will help stabilise the soil, reduce run-off and improve infiltration, and over time will improve soil organic matter. Cover crops also help to reduce nitrate and phosphate losses from land that would normally be left bare over the winter.

Please note: payment will not be made on over winter forage crops grown specifically for outwintering livestock.

Requirements

- Establish a quick-growing cover crop by **10th September** that will provide a dense cover and protect the land from soil erosion and run-off
- Destroy the cover crop in late January or early February, a maximum of 6 weeks before establishing the following spring crop
- When weather conditions delay establishment of a spring crop, the cover crop can be left until mid-March

This option should be used on vulnerable soil types, particularly light arable soils which are prone to soil erosion.

Choice of cover crop

- A mix should be used, but crops should be suitable for winter sowing, fast growing and frost tolerant to provide adequate cover over winter. If sowing grass this should be grown in a mixture.
- A mixture of seeds, such as rye, oats, vetch, phacelia, barley or mustard, can be sown, or other crops such as ryegrass or tillage radish, but the choice of cover crop will depend on herbicide selected and the rates of application for the previous crop
- Choice of cover crop will also depend on the crops grown in the rotation



How to manage the crop

- Remove any areas of soil compaction, but do not subsoil on archaeological features
- Establish the cover crop by 10th September, to provide adequate green cover to protect the soil before winter rainfall
- Establish by drilling or broadcasting
- Sow at a suitable seed rate to provide a dense cover and protect from soil erosion
- Destroy the cover crop from 20th January either with non selective herbicide, cultivation or grazing
- If grazing, this must be managed to prevent excessive poaching which can cause run-off
- Cover crops can be destroyed by the application of glyphosate or cultivations prior to the establishment of the following spring crop
- Cover crops receiving any other funding support (including through agri-environmental schemes or other auctions) will not be eligible for this measure

Using this option next to a watercourse

On fields next to a watercourse that are at risk of soil erosion and runoff, applicants should also consider creating buffer strips – see *Buffers to Intercept Run-Off*.

