

Benefits of using red clover as a cover crop

There are many benefits to using red clover as a cover crop, including nitrogen production, serving as a weed suppressor and being widely adaptable.

Posted on **December 15, 2014** by [Christina Curell](#), Michigan State University Extension



Photo courtesy of Todd Martin

Clover, also known as *Trifolium*, is a common genus of plant that can be found all across the United States. For this reason, clover is an ideal candidate for [cover crop](#) programs in many situations. Red clover is not only the most widely used clover as a cover crop, but it is also one of the most widely used as a cover. There are many benefits to using red clover. The following are just a few.

Widely adapted

Red clover grows in many different types of soil and under many different conditions. It can be used as a winter annual, a biennial or a short-lived perennial. It is able to grow in mountainous regions.

Attracts beneficial insects

Red clover attracts more beneficial insects than white clover, making it a good substitute.

Green manure/ground cover

When killed, red clover offers excellent green manure and ground cover. Its high biomass production leads to this. This green manure reduces nutrient runoff and soil erosion. Alive, its root system offers great soil conditioning.

Nitrogen production

Red clover produces on average 70-150 pounds per acre of nitrogen. This is a fairly standard amount across many legumes.

Dry matter/organic matter

Red clover can yield up to 2 to 3 tons of dry matter per acre. This is an extremely high amount. It also offers the variability of using medium red clover or mammoth clover to decide the timeframe in which the dry matter is applied to the field.

Weed suppressor

Once established, red clover serves as an excellent weed suppressor due to its high biomass. There can be issues with competition with grasses before complete establishment, so if your field possess summer annual grasses, avoid red clover.

Grazing

Red clover serves as a good grazing medium for cattle. Graze with cattle four to six weeks before first frost to prepare medium cut clover for overwintering. Look out for bloat.

[Michigan State University Extension](#) educators have developed fact sheets and pamphlets that will help you determine the best clover for your management needs. For more information on using cover crops or to request copies of the fact sheets, contact Christina Curell at curellc@anr.msu.edu or Paul Gross at grossp@anr.msu.edu.

This article was published by [Michigan State University Extension](#). For more information, visit <http://www.msue.msu.edu>. To have a digest of information delivered straight to your email inbox, visit <http://www.msue.msu.edu/newsletters>. To contact an expert in your area, visit <http://expert.msue.msu.edu>, or call 888-MSUE4MI (888-678-3464).