

Growing Annual Ryegrass

WHAT WE KNOW TO DATE

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Steve Ebelhar, research agronomist at the University of Illinois Dixon Springs Ag Center, evaluating annual ryegrass as a cover crop.

Why Annual Ryegrass?

- Alternative to Rye grain (less “stemy” growth, easier no-till planting).
- Suppression of weeds.
- Scavenger for left-over nitrogen.
- Cover for erosion control.
- Mulch for moisture conservation.
- Increase organic matter.

Where does it fit?

- After corn or soybean harvest.
- Best fit is after corn harvest as a cover crop for soybeans.

Fall Management

- Tillage or chopping corn stalks unnecessary with good no-till equipment.
- Drill (desired) at 20 lbs./acre or overseed at 25-30 lbs./acre.
- Plant between mid-September and mid-October (earlier is better).
- Plant at 1/4” to 1/2” depth.

Spring Management

- Spray between April 15 and May 1.
- May be advantageous to allow growth to May 1 during wet spring.
- Allowing ryegrass to grow past May 1 may cause stemy growth and seed heads. (Never allow seed heads to develop.)

Herbicides

- Round-up Ultra and Touchdown work well as burndown (use full label rate).
- Gramoxone kills tops but regrowth can occur.

Drawbacks

- Cannot allow ryegrass to set seed.
- Can be a problem in wheat.
- Hoelon and Achieve give good, but not excellent, control in wheat.
- Severe yield losses can occur if ryegrass not controlled in wheat.
- Too much spring growth of ryegrass can cause poor planter performance resulting in reduced stands. Critical to watch planter’s ability to no-till drill.



Annual ryegrass sprayed out in the early jointing stage (about two nodes), annual ryegrass leaves little surface residue.



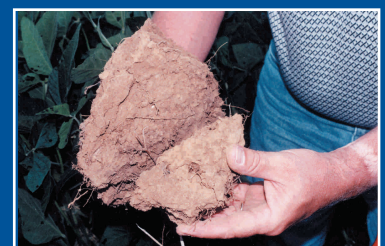
No-till soybeans in annual ryegrass.



Farmers in southern Illinois inspecting a 10-acre demonstration plot of soybeans planted into an annual ryegrass cover crop.



Surface residue left by annual ryegrass sprayed after heading.



Building soil tilth and preventing runoff – two important reasons for using a cover crop like annual ryegrass.