

Summer Cover Crops for Nursery Row Middles

by Mark Halcomb, UT Extension Area Nursery Specialist
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Several soil conscious nursery growers have asked for a summer cover crop that could be drilled into the row middles in late spring or early summer. This is of more interest to the grower with middles wider than six feet. Holding the soil in place is the primary purpose, but returning some organic matter back to the soil eventually is another significant benefit.

I felt the criteria should be:

1. The seed should be capable of being drilled by one of the narrow row nursery seed drills.
2. Not be too competitive, or too aggressive in competing for moisture and nutrients.
3. Does not creep. Avoid Ladino white clover. It creeps with stolons.
4. If seed do develop, for one of the DNA preemergence type herbicides to prevent their germination in the row.
5. Height of this crop can be controlled by mowing. Mowing can be accomplished faster and more cheaply than disking or tilling. Tilling is a harmful practice to the soil and tractors anyway.
6. A summer legume might not be a good idea, if a nematode population is present. The legume would help to maintain or increase that population. The potential problem would be greater if a legume was grown year round, year after year. The first summer legume of choice would be Red Clover. It would last about two years. Drill 20 lbs per acre rate, August 15 to September 15 or February 20 to April 1.
7. The drilled width can be reduced by using duct tape over the openings on either side of the drill or some other ingenious method.

Summer Annuals suggested for trial in nursery row middles, if mowing is possible

(listed in order of preference)

1. *Sorghum Sudangrass*

Very good root system for erosion prevention. A lot of foliage will be produced, adding the most organic matter back to the soil, of any choice.

Must be mowed frequently.

Drill at the 50 lb per acre seeding rate, April 20 - July 1. Buy the cheapest variety available.

2. *Pearl Millet* (variety not important)

Is the next most competitive summer annual considered for nursery row middle trial.

Must be mowed frequently.

Very good for erosion prevention.

Drill 30 lb per acre rate, May 1 - July 1.

3. *Foxtail Millet or German Millet*

Listed here in 3rd position, but better than 3rd choice.

We are anxious to see it used for this purpose.

1 - 2 mowings per summer are expected.

Drill 30 lb per acre rate, May 1 - July 1.

4. *Browntop Millet*

Drill 40 lb per acre rate, May 1 - July 1.

May not be vigorous enough for this purpose.

Perennials suggested for trial in nursery row middles, if mowing is possible

1. *Fungus-free Tall Fescue*

The fungus-free fescue is suggested here because it is not as competitive as the infected fescue. Roadways and grassed waterways require the fungus infected fescue.

Drill 30 lb per acre rate, August 15 - September 15 or February 20 - April 1.

2. *Orchardgrass* (Variety not important)

Tolerates more shade than fescue, in case the nursery plants provide some shade.

Drill 20 lb per acre rate, August 15 - September 15 or February 20 - April 1.

*** This information is suggested for trial purposes. These forages have not been researched in a nursery situation. Joe Burns, UT Extension Forage Specialist, provided this information May 1992 and Dr. Gary Bates approved it Feb, 2002.

Comm/Field/Soil Improvement/Summer cover crops for row middles

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