

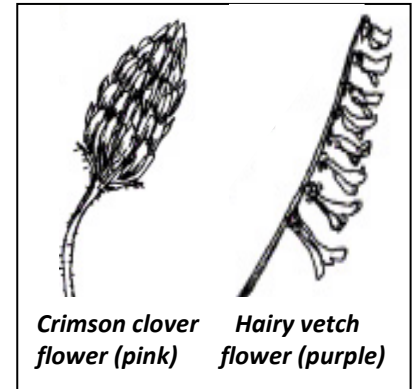
Managing your Over-wintering Cover Crops in Spring

So you planted an over-wintering cover crop last fall and now you have a beautiful stand of crimson clover, vetch, rye, or a mixture! Here are some tips as you prepare beds for planting vegetables.

❖ Wait for legumes to flower

Legumes like clover and vetch should be killed while in full bloom, but before they set seed. Here's why:

- **Soil quality and fertility.** Allowing cover crops to grow until flowering maximizes their contributions to soil organic matter and nitrogen. Most nitrogen fixation happens during *spring* growth!
- **Prevent weed problems.** Legumes that are cut before they flower may regrow, and become weeds among your veggies! ☹️



❖ To Dig or Not to Dig? : Cut-and Mulch or Dig In your cover crop

When the time comes to cut down your cover crop, you have two options:

- **Cut-and-Mulch:** Cut off the shoots **at ground level** using hedge shears or a small sickle, and leave them as mulch on the soil surface. **DO NOT pull up the plants** – letting the roots decompose in place aerates the soil and preserves organic matter.



- Cut-and mulch before planting crops you will **transplant** (tomatoes, peppers, zucchini, etc.).
- Advantages: Best for soil quality (reduces disturbance); mulch conserves moisture & keeps down weeds; less labor
- Disadvantages: You **MUST** wait until the cover crop is flowering!



- **Digging In:** Use a shovel to chop the shoots and work them into the top 3-5 inches of the soil.
 - Dig in cover crops for a **fine seedbed** (for small-seeded crops, like carrots).
 - Advantages: Best for rapid release of nitrogen from the cover crop
 - Disadvantages: Less weed control than cut-and-mulch; lots of work!

❖ Preparing beds for planting vegetables

- **If you Cut-and-Mulch:** You can transplant right away... just push apart the cover crop mulch, leaving space around the transplants.
- **If you Dig In:** Wait **at least 10 days**, then check the seedbed. If there are clumps of plant material, wait a little longer before planting seeds. Grasses (e.g., wheat, rye) may take longer than legumes (e.g., clover, vetch). Allowing enough time for the cover crop to break down in the soil is important to replenish soil water and nutrients before planting vegetable crops.