

Clover Alternatives for Nursery Middles

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Several producers have inquired about alternatives to Crimson Red Clover as a winter cover crop for nursery middles due to an increase in the price of the seed of clover. I have discussed the characteristics of several different forages with our UT Extension Forage Specialist, with the inquiring producers and we have looked for potential problems with each.

Rye or wheat could be seeded in Sept-Oct and die with hot weather much like the clover. I am not recommending either, except for trial purposes. We do advise against annual ryegrass and perennial ryegrass as being too aggressive and perhaps more difficult to kill before the next growing season.

Rye and wheat are annual crops that die after producing seed. Mowing prior to heading will thicken the foliage. Mowing or cultivation during late heading, but prior to seed maturation, will allow little regrowth and the plants will eventually die.

The postemergence grass herbicides (Envoy Plus, Fusilade & Segment) will kill rye and wheat as well. The standing dead plants would serve as effective mulch, delaying weed seed germination within the middles, just like crimson clover until the sun reaches the soil and stimulates germination of the weed seed that are present.

Rye or wheat could be an effective substitute for clover: foot and vehicular traffic will be supported, erosion reduced, weed growth will be suppressed as long as the foliage shades the soil, organic matter will be added to the soil eventually and wildlife may prefer to eat this rather the nursery crop.

Rye or wheat can be seeded later than clover but will not generate the 30-40 pounds of actual nitrogen per acre that inoculated clover would.

The seeding rate is 1.5 bushels per solid acre. The seeding rate should be adjusted for the width of the drill and the width of the middle. Will your clover seed drill handle the rye or wheat seed? Some will, some will not.

Fescue or orchardgrass should be considered if a permanent grass is desired in the middles. Nothing will stunt an ornamental worse than fescue in the root zone area but nothing holds the soil together any better in roadways and slopes to reduce erosion than fescue.

The fungus-free tall fescue is suggested for the middles, because it is not as competitive as the infected fescue. Use the infected fescue on the roadways and grass strips.

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