



John looks at the healthy soil in a recently harvested row of carrots. On the right is a grass harvest lane.

picking to budgeting, business planning and crew management. Some of the learning is classroom based, but 90 percent is on-the-job training. We are the first in the nation to provide an official vegetable apprentice program.”

Lidia, deemed unsuitable in her home country to manage a farm, is doing just that, sharing the responsibility with John. She does most of the training pertaining to day-to-day tasks and basic farm skills, and she runs the greenhouse, harvest and packing shed operations.

The couple enjoy the Spring Green community. “Here there is a strong ethos of sharing. We do a lot of collective marketing with small businesses, craftsmen, bakers, potters. We’re all working to make this an interesting destination. There’s a reason I ended up here. I like grower-to-grower education. I’m doing it for my own moral reasons,” said John. And he enjoys biological farming, especially growing cover crops. “If I could earn a living growing only them, that’s what I would do.”

Their motto at Fazenda Boa Terra is “Revitalizing Frank Lloyd Wright’s agricultural legacy one plant at a time.” For now, they plan on staying at Taliesin and showing people how to farm with an eye to the future. And for good reason: Their first child, a boy, is due this fall.

# The Wonders of Cover Crops

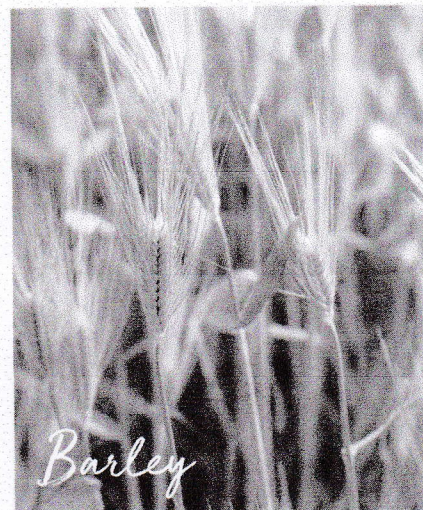
Tired of weeding, fighting insects and buying fertilizer? Read on!

**EDITOR’S NOTE:** Lidia Dungue and John Middleton are passionate about cover cropping. When told we’d like to give our readers some information about the practice, they readily responded with infectious enthusiasm. After reading what cover crops can do, we predict you’ll want to sow some seeds, whether in your little kitchen garden or a larger veggie patch. Cover crop seed mixes are readily available at farm and garden supply stores.

We use a variety of cover crops for specific reasons, which we profile to give you an idea of how we use this critical farm management tool. You can synergize the benefits of each species by mixing multiple species together. Some common mixes are oats and peas, rye and vetch, annual rye and clover, barley and beans, Sudan grass and clover or beans.

**OATS:** Ideal for spring and fall seeding, oats can provide 1 to 4 tons per acre of dry organic matter depending on when it is plowed under to feed soil microorganisms. When seeded in the fall, it can act as a nutrient catch by absorbing upwards of 80 pounds per acre of nitrogen that could otherwise be lost and become a pollutant. It has allelopathic properties (natural exudates that hinder the germination of weed seeds), which help control weeds throughout the growth cycle and for several weeks after plow down.

Oats germinate and establish quickly and are a valuable nurse crop for slower-growing legumes, helping to provide cover and protection for crops like clovers and peas, beans or



alfalfa that are quite slow in their early growth phases. They can also be used for animal feed and straw.

**BARLEY:** Barley’s use is similar to oats. The main differences are that it doesn’t scavenge nutrients quite as effectively, but it makes better animal fodder and can produce more dry organic matter than oats per acre. In certain circumstances, such as in alkaline soils, it will establish well and help bring the soil pH down to a normal range.

**RYE:** This is probably the most popular of all cover crops as it is very versatile and resilient, and the seed is cheap. You can use it almost any time of the year, and it is very cold tolerant. It will germinate even when temperatures go down into the low 30s and will survive most winters at northern latitudes. Some years it can be seeded as late as mid-November, following late crops such as broccoli and cauliflower. It will grow enough to hold the soil over the winter and grow vigorously again in March and April. A great nutrient scavenger, it can capture nutrients and store them over the winter and release them when plowed in come spring. It has good allelopathy and attracts many beneficial insects. It’s a great choice for straw and can be baled in the spring to be used that same season or stored for the following year.

**BUCKWHEAT:** This is a favorite summer cover crop for many reasons. It is the best option for a short growing window; you can fit it in between spring and fall cash crops or a spring cover crop and a fall cash crop. It can be drilled and plowed down in as little as six weeks, is a

