

great weed smother crop because of its rapid growth and thrives in worn-out soils, helping them to recover by scavenging a broad array of nutrients. It also produces tons of nectar-rich flowers that support many pollinators and beneficial insects.

SORGHUM SUDANGRASS: An amazing summer workhorse, it can easily reach 12 feet tall and produce up to 9 tons per acre of organic biomass if left to grow. This is one of the best weed suppressors of all the cover crops, not just because of its rapid and massive growth, but because the allelopathic exudate sorgoleone can act as a powerful natural herbicide against many noxious weeds. It is particularly beneficial in suppressing parasitic nematodes and many diseases.

If mowed several times throughout the season, it will produce a massive root system that can greatly improve soil tilth and aeration and drive roots deep to help mitigate compaction and allow better water infiltration. Like barley, it does well in alkaline soils and will help bring the pH down to a healthier level. It also makes fantastic forage for cattle and other ruminants so long as it is at least 2 feet tall. Smaller plants contain higher concentrations of prussic acid that can be toxic to cattle.

ANNUAL RYEGRASS: This is a preferred nurse crop for clovers and other slow-germinating crops. The seed is cheap and can be easily killed by mowing or frost after providing the necessary cover for clover to get up and going. If sown under cash crops such as broccoli, kale, cauliflower or peppers, it will establish itself, hold the soil together and die off in the frost but leave the soil covered and protected after the cash crops die, allowing you to avoid late season tillage.

LEGUMES: What makes all legumes unique is that they are nitrogen fixers. This means that they take in atmospheric nitrogen, pulling it from the air and storing it in their roots. With legumes, you literally grow your own nitrogen fertilizer. Here are some of the most commonly planted ones.

WHITE, RED & YELLOW SWEET CLOVERS: Depending on the clover, it can produce



upwards of 50 to 150 pounds of nitrogen per acre. Clovers are also renowned for their ability to send roots deep through the hardpan to open up channels for water and nutrients in deeper soil layers. They are all winter hardy and begin to grow again early in the spring, making them valuable for soil conservation or

forage. The nutrient- and protein-rich leaves are a favorite of our pastured chickens.

VETCH: This legume has very similar properties to the clovers with a few distinct differences. It doesn't fix as much nitrogen as clover but makes up for it with its amazing ability as a soil conditioner. It is unmatched in its ability to stabilize soil aggregation and help build soil organic matter. It's a better nutrient scavenger than other legumes as well as a better weed suppressor, particularly in the spring.

PEAS & SOYBEANS: These crops are used in a similar way, with peas doing better in the spring and soybeans in the summer. They have been found to fix up to 300 pounds of nitrogen per acre, though 100 to 150 pounds per acre is more likely.

They produce 2 to 3 tons of dry organic matter per acre, but have few benefits as weed suppressors (unless mixed with a grain crop) or nutrient scavengers, though they do attract pollinators. ☼

—Lidia Dunge and John Middleton

NATURE'S HEAD

Self-Contained Composting Toilet

The Best. By Design.

- ◆ No Plumbing Required
- ◆ All Stainless Steel Hardware
- ◆ Exceptional Holding Capacity
- ◆ Compact
- ◆ No Odor
- ◆ 5-Year Warranty
- ◆ Urine Diverting

www.NaturesHead.net
251-295-3043

FREE SHIPPING FOR ONLINE ORDERS

Use coupon code **NPS1788** at checkout
Offer expires 1/31/2019

