

Using Cover Crops in High Tunnels

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Happy Town Farm is a small, diversified organic farm where we grow 4 acres of vegetables and flowers, raise a variety of animals and poultry, and make maple syrup. As part of our growing operation we have four high tunnels. One of the high tunnels is dedicated to flowers and the other three are used to grow vegetables. Two of the vegetable houses are 21' by 96' and the other one is 17' by 96'. We try to market crops from the high tunnels nine months of the year. As an organic farmer we use crop rotation, compost, green manures and cover crops to build and maintain the fertility of the soil, both in the fields and in the high tunnels. The vegetables are grouped in families and are rotated through the houses. The first year of the rotation is tomatoes, the second is cucumbers and basil, and the third year is salad greens and lettuce. After the tomatoes are cleaned out, usually the last week of October or the first week of November, we plant winter rye or hairy vetch and winter rye. Also, in the house that will be in greens the next summer, half of the house is planted to greens in the late fall and the other half of the house to winter rye. The green manure crop grows until late April by which time the rye is three to four feet tall. It is then cut with a weed wacker and incorporated with a Troybilt rototiller. In two weeks we spread compost, lay plastic and transplant seedlings.

Over the years, we have been very pleased with the health and vigor of the crops grown in our high tunnels following the rye cover crops.