Annual ryegrass, also called Italian ryegrass, is a turf grass with a dense, shallow root system. The extensive root system of this cover crop tolerates compacted soils and makes it an effective catch crop for excess nitrogen.

It offers many benefits, including erosion control, improvement of aggregate stability, and minimization of soil compaction, which is useful in high traffic areas.

It can also be used as a nurse crop with fall-planted legumes such as clover. Ryegrass will tolerate a wide range of soils but performs best on loam soils with high fertility.

Seeding Rate: 2oz/100 sq feet
Seeding Date: May - September
Special needs: None, very tolerant

**Improve your soil with cover cropping**

At the end of the growing season you may be ready to rest, but your garden is not. One final effort can make a big difference: cover cropping. Even small gardens will benefit from the use of cover crops, or “green manures”.

Tilling, weeding, harvesting and foot traffic of most home gardens tends to destroy soil structure. Planting cover crops is an easy way to revitalize the soil, and help soil tilth and subsequent plant growth. Cover crops are planted in vacant space and worked into the soil after they grow instead of being eaten. They provide a number of advantages to the otherwise wasteful use of space during your garden’s off-season.

Cover crops help to retain the soil, lessen erosion, and decrease the impact of precipitation on the garden by slowing the runoff of water. They also reduce mineral leaching and compaction, and suppress perennial and winter annual weed growth. The top growth adds organic matter when it is tilled into the garden soil. The cover crop’s root system also provides organic matter and opens passageways that help improve air and water movement in the soil.

Success in the growth of cover crops requires proper selection of the kind of cover crop, correct timing of seeding, and good management techniques.

For more information and cover cropping resources:
[www.gardening.cornell.edu/covercrop](http://www.gardening.cornell.edu/covercrop)