

Green Manures No. TGM19

Hairy vetch, *Vicia villosa*

Green manures are plants which are grown mainly for the benefit of the soil. They can be grown as part of a rotation or in an intercropping system to build soil fertility, or as a cover crop to protect bare soil from erosion. Full details on the benefits and practice of using green manures can be found in HDRA's booklet 'Green manures/Cover crops'.

Vicia villosa is also known as winter vetch, sand vetch woolypod vetch



Growing conditions

- Annual rainfall: Hairy vetch requires rainfall of 300mm to 1660mm.
- Altitude: It will survive at altitudes up to 2500m.
- Temperature: 4° C to 21° C. It is mainly for use in more temperate zones.
- Soil type: It tolerates a wide range of soils from pH 4.9 to 8.2. It does less well on sandy soils.

Nitrogen fixation

Hairy vetch is a legume. This means that it has nodules on its roots which contain bacteria. These bacteria take nitrogen from the air. This is known as nitrogen fixation. The plant uses this to grow and when the legume is dug into the soil, the extra nitrogen is made available to the next crop.

Cultivation

Broadcast sow the seeds (5-6kg/ha) onto freshly prepared and firmed soil. Incorporate lightly into the soil to no more than 2cm. Dry conditions can reduce germination of hairy vetch.

Growth form

Hairy vetch is a straggling, climbing annual or perennial plant.

Recommended application

It can be treated as an annual green manure and dug in prior to flowering. It can also be cut and used as a mulch to suppress weeds and conserve moisture.

Human food

Hairy vetch is not suitable for human consumption.

Animal food

Hairy vetch makes good hay, silage and pasture.

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