



GAME COVER CROPS 2026



FOR THE FUTURE
OF FARMING



A successfully managed shoot is profitable and contributes positively to the countryside and the overall environment. The existence of cover crops increases the volumes of farmland birds and increases biodiversity. Planning crops around any environmental schemes will also provide additional income.

Establishing Game Cover Crops

Game cover crops will only reach their full potential if they are well managed from the start. Using a mix of crops in conjunction with woodland and hedgerows will provide a habitat offering:

Food

- Many crops produce naturally occurring food sources
- Crops providing seed and grain in winter months
- Seed bearing crops will also hold birds on a shoot

Shelter

- Provide protection from weather and predators
- Well standing throughout the winter
- Provide shelter
- Correct crop thickness is crucial to allow birds to move freely

Cover

- Nesting cover mixes offer areas to move between hedgerows and cover crops in relative safety from predators
- Perennial crops offer cover in the spring months
- Canary grass can act as a windbreak

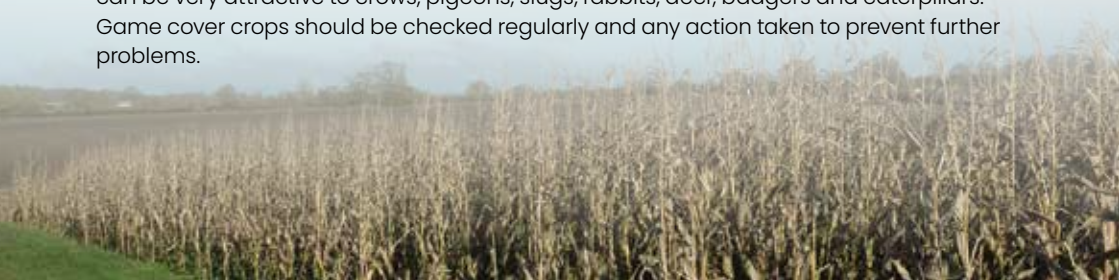
Soil Tests & Fertiliser – Testing of soil is essential to determine the soil pH and fertility of soil. Farmyard manure will improve soil structure and add fertility.

Crop Rotation – Rotations are essential to help reduce soil borne diseases such as club root in brassicas. A rotational system will also help to improve soil fertility and structure. Crop rotation is essential where weeds or disease have been a persistent problem.

Cultivations – A well prepared seed bed is essential for crop health and development as a rapidly growing game cover crop has more chance of resisting pest attack. Ploughing and rapid consolidation to conserve moisture is the ideal start for these crops. Ensure the seed bed is fine and firm to help reduce the risk of slug activity.

Sowing – It is better to drill gamecover crops where possible. This ensures accurate seed depth and row width and will provide maximum seed to soil contact which will aid establishment. Sowing at the correct row width will also improve bird holding and driving capability. Do not sow too early to ensure the soil temperature is warm enough to encourage a quick successful germination.

Pests – As game cover crops are often sown in the spring near to woods and trees they can be very attractive to crows, pigeons, slugs, rabbits, deer, badgers and caterpillars. Game cover crops should be checked regularly and any action taken to prevent further problems.



Game Cover Crop Options

Crop	Cover	Feed	Sowing Date	Utilisation period	Duration of crop	Broadcast / Ha (Kg)	Drill / ha (Kg)	Drill Depth cm	Row width cm
Maize	✓	✓	Apr – Jun	Sep – Feb	1 Season		111,150–123,500 seeds	6	75
Kale	✓		Apr – Jun	Sep – Mar	1 – 2 Yrs	5 – 75	3 – 5	1 – 2	50
Forage Rape	✓		May – Sep	Jul – Dec	1 Season	10	6	1 – 2.5	15 – 20
Hybrid Brassica	✓		May – Sep	Jul – Dec	1 Season	10	6	1 – 2.5	15 – 20
Sorghum	✓		May – Jun	Sep – Feb	1 Season		20	2.5 – 4	45 – 50
Millet	✓	✓	Apr – Jun	Sep – Dec	1 Season	12	12	1 – 1.5	35 – 45
Reed / Canary Grass	✓		Apr – Jun	All Year	5+ Yrs		6	1.5	70 – 90
Sunflower	✓	✓	Apr – Jun	Jul – Nov	1 season		12	4	75
Quinoa	✓	✓	Apr – Jun	Sep – Dec	1 season	5+	5	1.5	45
Triticale	✓	✓	Spr – Aut	Aug – Feb	1 season		125	2.5	12 – 16
Gold of Pleasure	✓	✓	Apr – May	Sep – Dec	1 season	12+	12	1	8 – 18
Phacelia	✓		Apr – Aug	Jul – Oct	1 season	75 – 10		1 – 2	Various
Buckwheat	✓	✓	Apr – May	Aug – Dec	1 season	50+	500	1 – 2.5	20 – 35
White Mustard	✓		Spr – Aut	Aug – Dec	1 season	12 – 17	6 – 12	1 – 2.5	20 – 35
Brown Mustard	✓		Spr – Aut	Aut / Spr	1 season	5 – 7.5	2.5 – 7.5	1 – 2.5	20 – 35
Fodder Radish	✓	✓	Spr – Aut	Jul – Dec	1 season	8	6	1 – 2.5	25 – 30
Linseed	✓	✓	Apr – May	Sep – Feb	1 season		60	1 – 2	8 – 18
Perennial Chicory	✓		Spr – Aut	All Year	5 + Yrs	5+	5	1	15 – 20
Yellow Blossom Clover	✓		Apr – Jun	All Year	1 – 2 Yrs	7.5	5	0.5	75
Feed & Cover Mix	✓	✓	Spring	Sep – Feb	1 season		40	1 – 2.5	12 – 16
Broadshot Mix	✓	✓	Spring	Sep – Feb	1 season	15	15	1 – 2.5	12 – 16
Traditional Game Cover Mix	✓	✓	Apr – Jun	Sep – Feb	1 season	125	12.5	N/A	N/A
Rescue mixture	✓	✓	Jun – Sep	Sep – Dec	1 season	12+	12	1 – 2	45 – 50
Wild Bird seed Mix	✓	✓	Spr / Aut	Sep – Feb	1 season		40	1–2	10 – 12

Game Maize

One of the most popular crops used for cover and feed. The height of maize may vary depending on seasonal and management variations. The later the sowing date the later the maturity of the maize.

Straight Maize – Very good standing ability, early vigour and a low cob carriage. Available with fungicide and bird repellent.

Maize Blend – Mixture of varieties with varying maturity. The mix will give differing rates of maturity as cobs ripen at different times. Provides cover throughout the whole of the shooting season. Available with fungicide and bird repellent.

Late Shot – Selected for very late maturity and good standing ability. Produces an immature cob that only develops to the 'bright white' stage under normal UK conditions. Due to the late cob formation it tends to be of less interest to rats and badgers. Available with fungicide and bird repellent.

Brassicas

Kale – One of the most popular cover crops and will provide cover for the whole shooting season. Kale requires soil with a pH of around 6.5. It is a hungry crop so will benefit from the application of farmyard manure / slurry prior to sowing. The continuous growing of kale on ground can cause 'brassica sickness' – club root which will inhibit or prevent the growth of brassica crops but this can be prevented by growing kale and another crop such as maize in adjacent strips and alternating the strips.

Forage Rape – Particularly useful in that it can be used as a rescue or catch crop. Will continue into the new year when it flowers and goes to seed. Provides good cover for holding, driving and feeding. Largely unaffected by frost and wet weather.

Spitfire Hybrid – Forage Brassica cross of rape and kale and is a good companion to use with other fast establishing brassicas. Rapid growing and can be used as a rescue crop that will provide good cover for holding, driving and feeding game birds. Medium tall variety with excellent aphid tolerance.

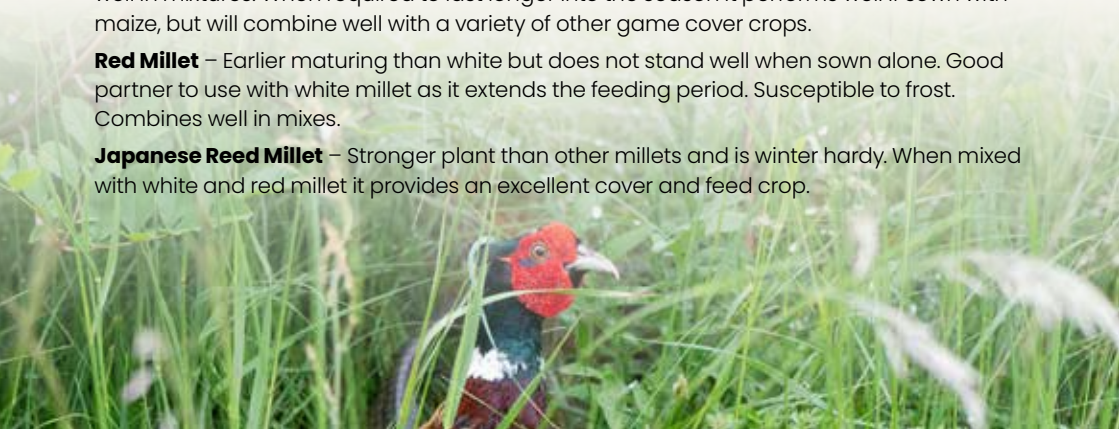
Millet

Provides a valuable feed source to hold the birds along with a degree of cover. Easy to grow. Excellent partner to kale, maize and sorghum adding feed value and warmth.

White Millet – Best suited to more southernly regions as like's sunshine and is not frost hardy. Provides warmth, shelter and feed. Will attract wild seed eating birds. Combines well in mixtures. When required to last longer into the season it performs well if sown with maize, but will combine well with a variety of other game cover crops.

Red Millet – Earlier maturing than white but does not stand well when sown alone. Good partner to use with white millet as it extends the feeding period. Susceptible to frost. Combines well in mixes.

Japanese Reed Millet – Stronger plant than other millets and is winter hardy. When mixed with white and red millet it provides an excellent cover and feed crop.



Sorghums

A semi tropical, non cob producing maize like plant which although slow to establish will provide cover throughout the shooting season. It thrives best in warm, sunny growing conditions. More suited to Southern regions. If rats and badgers are a problem, intermediate sorghum can provide a similar height to maize crops without the cob. The height of sorghum may vary depending on seasonal and management variations.

Dwarf Sorghum – Short, sturdy, broad leaved stem and large seed head. Provides birds with warm cover throughout the shooting season. Ideal for driving and winter cover. Excellent replacement to kale. Average height 1 – 1.25m. Often sown as a companion to maize with the bulkier, shorter sorghum plants giving protection to the birds below the taller growing maize plants.

Intermediate Sorghum – Useful as a windbreak around other game crops. Has an attractive seed head and makes an excellent driving cover. Provides protection from overhead predators. Earlier sown crops can produce large seed heads with excellent standing ability. Crop height up to 1.25m.

Giant Sorghum – Stands approximately 2 metres tall and is therefore extremely useful as a windbreak to protect other crops. Its deep root system allows it to withstand drought. Useful as a flushing crop even though it is prone to lodging later in the season.

Sunflowers

Provide highly nutritious seed of high oil content. Mostly grown in conjunction with other game crops either in mixtures or in adjacent blocks. Sunflowers sown in April or early May can grow quickly in warm weather. Flowers start to form in June and colour by July / August. Flowering lasts approximately 2 – 3 weeks and seed can be used for farmland birds and game from early October.

Standard Sunflowers – Large attractive flowers of variable height but generally tall. For best utilisation of this crop, it should be 'swiped down' to enable game birds to reach the nutritious seeds

Dwarf Sunflowers – Short variety with good standing ability. Seed heads tend to be larger than standard types. These are best 'swiped down' to enable birds to reach the large seed heads, providing plenty of nutritious seed.



Other Crops

Canary Grass – Provides excellent medium to long term nesting cover. Can be used to hold or drive birds. Useful in areas where annual planting is not an option. Will grow on poor soils and exposed areas. Needs to be drilled in wide rows to prevent the crop becoming too dense and therefore impassable for the birds. Annual management is required to keep the rows clear and topping is beneficial if the grass becomes too tall, with the debris being removed. Crop height 1st year – 50-60 cm. 2nd year – 150 cm.

Reed Canary Grass – More suitable to exposed Northern regions than canary grass as it is a hardier plant. Will tolerate a range of soil types. Purely for cover and does not provide feed. Annual management should be undertaken to keep the rows clear. Topping is beneficial if it becomes too tall, with the debris removed.

Quinoa – Capable of producing plentiful amounts of seed and a popular choice of crop for holding birds. Commonly grown with kale, quinoa provides cover and feed until it begins to collapse in the first frosts with the kale providing more permanent cover.

Triticale – Provides good cover and feed. Good for marginal low fertility areas where it will thrive with little input. Withstands rabbit attacks. Winter hardy. Useful in areas where maize and millet are not an option and where brassica sickness is a problem.

Gold of Pleasure – Well suited to poor and nutrient deficient soils. Fast maturing and very attractive to partridge. For exposed areas combining gold of pleasure with triticale, barley and linseed is a good mix option.

Phacelia – Prolific seeder. Very fast to establish and a good weed suppressant. Not winter hardy. Best sown as a mix. Phacelia is likely to set seed and reseed itself for many years to come. It competes well with weeds.

Buckwheat – Thick, bushy, rapid growing short term crop providing cover and feed. Highly attractive to pheasants and partridges. Useful when added to mixtures due to its bulkiness and its ability to continue to provide holding cover and feed after the first frosts. Seed shed occurs in early Autumn. Thrives best in sunny rather than shaded areas.

White Mustard – Highly versatile cover crop, either sown alone or as a companion to other species. Mustard is drought tolerant. Not frost tolerant. Creates shelter for birds.

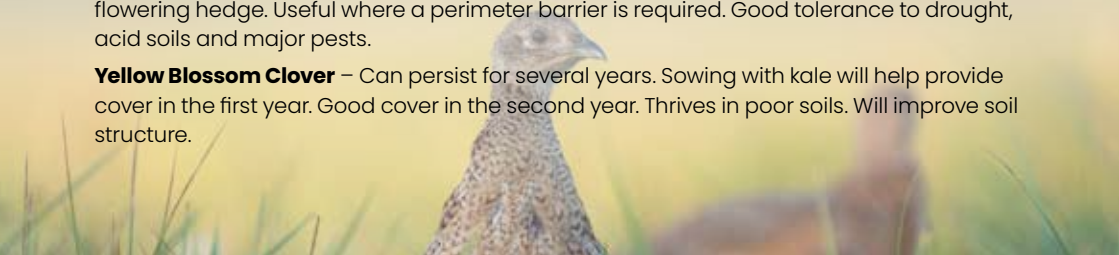
Brown Mustard – Fast growing cover crop, easy to establish. Winter hardy and will improve the health of the soil and acts as a weed suppressant.

Fodder Radish – Fast growing cover crop. Quick to establish which aids weed suppression. Provides good cover. Holds its seed in pods which shed in late winter / early spring, providing feed during the important 'hungry gap'. Good where brassica sickness is a problem due to immunity to the disease. Due to its fast growth it is valuable as a replacement for failed crops.

Linseed – Attractive to partridge. Easy to grow providing cover. Tolerant of many soil types. An option where brassica sickness has been a problem. Not frost hardy.

Perennial Chicory – Tall, dense cover, bolting in its second year to create a 6 – 7 ft flowering hedge. Useful where a perimeter barrier is required. Good tolerance to drought, acid soils and major pests.

Yellow Blossom Clover – Can persist for several years. Sowing with kale will help provide cover in the first year. Good cover in the second year. Thrives in poor soils. Will improve soil structure.



Wild Bird Seed Mixtures

Wild Bird Seed mixtures provide important food resources for farmland birds & insects
Compliant with some environmental schemes.

Species	WBS1 1 Year Spring Sown ⁺ AB9/AHL2/CAHL2	WBS2 1-2 Year Spring Sown ⁺ AB9/AHL2/CAHL2	WBS3 1 Year Spring Sown AB9/AHL2/CAHL2	WBS4 1 Year Spring Sown AB9/AHL2/CAHL2	Feed & Cover Mixture AB9/AHL2/CAHL2	Farmland (Wild) Bird Seed Mixture Non Cereal AB9/AHL2/CAHL2	Broadshot Mixture AB9/AHL2/CAHL2	Traditional Game Cover Mixture AB9/AHL2/CAHL2	WBA 1 1-2 Year Autumn Sown AB16/AHW1	WBA 2 2 Year Autumn Sown AB16/AHW1
Triticale	40%	45%	50%	45%	25%				15%	15%
Barley	28%	20%	20%	25%	24%				25%	25%
Wheat	15%	15%			24%				30%	26%
Oats			10%							
Fodder Radish	10%	4%				5%			5%	8%
White Millet	5%	4%		7%	6%		10%	7%		
Red Millet	2%	2%		3%	2.5%		8%	7%		
Japanese Reed Millet				4%	3%		5%			
Kale		7%					17%	8%		5%
Quinoa		3%			1%	3%	4%	4%		
Linseed			7%	5%		40%				
Forage Rape			5%				8%	3%	5%	
Gold of Pleasure			4%	2.5%	2.5%		4%	7%	3%	3.4%
White Mustard			4%			7%		7%		
Dwarf Sorghum				8.5%	7%			14%		
Sunflower					5%			8%		
Buckwheat						33%	34%	30%		
Phacelia						5%	9.5%	5%		1%
Vetch									6%	6%
Teasel							0.5%			
Lucerne									3%	3%
Alsike Clover									2%	
Birdsfoot Trefoil									2%	1%
Crimson Clover									2%	5%
Red Clover									2%	1%
Black Knapweed (N)										0.2%
Oxeye Daisy										0.2%
Yarrow										0.2%
Sowing Rate	16kg/acre (40kg/ha)	16kg/acre (40kg/ha)	16kg/acre (40kg/ha)	16kg/acre (40kg/ha)	16kg/acre (40kg/ha)	8kg/acre (20kg/ha)	6kg/acre (15kg/ha)	5kg/acre (12.5kg/ha)	16-20kg/ acre (40- 50kg/ha)	16-20kg/acre (40-50kg/ ha)
Pack Size	20kg & 500Kg	20kg & 500Kg	20kg	20kg	20kg	20kg	10kg	25kg	20kg	20kg

Game Cover Mixtures

Game cover mixtures are specially formulated to ensure full season cover that will provide holding, feed and cover for all game birds.

Combining different species into a mixture can extend the utilisation period, help to attract and hold specific types of game and provide feed and cover where both are required.

Specialised mixtures to suit individual specific requirements can be arranged.

Species	Feed & Cover Mixture	Broadshot Mixture	Traditional Game Cover Mixture	Rescue Mixture
Triticale	25%			
Barley	24%			
Wheat	24%			
Fodder Radish				15%
White Millet	6%	10%	7%	
Red Millet	2.5%	8%	7%	
Japanese Reed Millet	3%	5%		
Kale		17%	8%	
Quinoa	1%	4%	4%	
Forage Rape		8%	3%	10%
Gold of Pleasure	2.5%	4%	7%	10%
White Mustard			7%	20%
Dwarf Sorghum	7%		14%	
Sunflower	5%		8%	
Buckwheat		34%	30%	40%
Phacelia		9.5%	5%	5%
Teasel		0.5%		
Sowing Rate	16kg/acre (40kg/ha)	6kg/acre (15kg/ha)	5kg/acre (12.5kg/ha)	5kg/acre (12.5kg/ha)
Pack Size	20kg	10kg	25kg	10kg

For information on our Marsdens Game Feeds:

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For further information on Game Cover

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