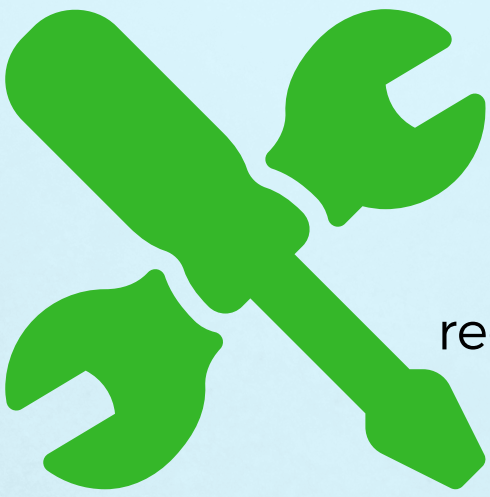
COVER CROPS AT WORK

Keeping the soil in place & increasing infiltration

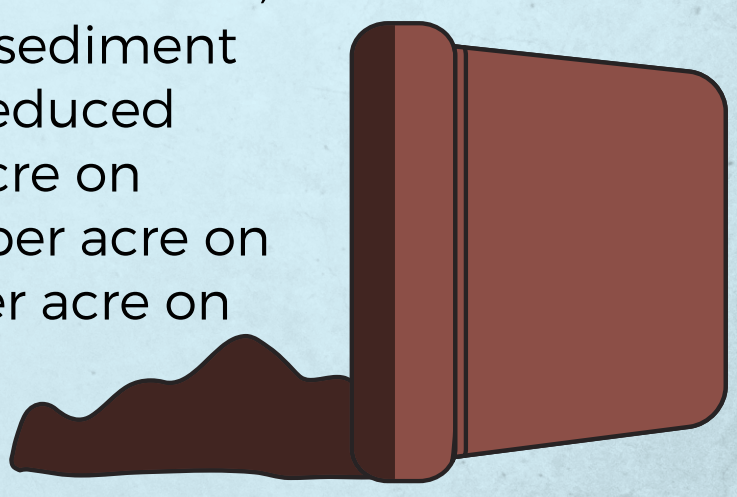


THE TOOLKIT

Cover crops are tools to keep the soil in place, improve soil health, and reduce nutrient pollution from farm fields. The cover crop toolkit includes grasses, brassicas, legumes, and other broadleaf species.

SOIL LOSS

Cover crops decrease, and in some cases, completely eliminate soil and sediment loss. On average, cover crops reduced sediment loss by 21 tons per acre on conventional-till fields, 6 tons per acre on reduced-till fields, and 1 ton per acre on no-till fields.



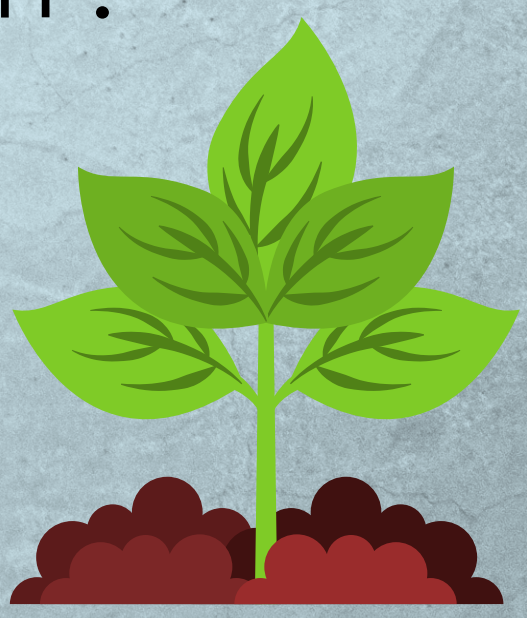
INFILTRATION

Studies have shown that cover crops can increase water infiltration to the soil profile by two to sixfold. This improves soil water conditions and prevents excess runoff and erosion.

HOW DO THEY DO IT?

Cover crops are able to provide these benefits to the soil because they:

- Cover and protect the soil surface from wind and water erosion
- Root into the soil profile, making channels for water flow
- Improve the soil structure
- Prevent the soil surface from sealing



By keeping the soil in place and improving soil conditions, cover crops are mitigating pollution risk while also boosting the productive capacity of the soil.

All data comes from a bibliography compiled by the Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Program (SARE) and the University of Missouri.. This graphic was developed under Cooperative Agreement No.83695601 awarded by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. EPA made comments and suggestions on the document intended to improve the scientific analysis and technical accuracy of the document The views expressed in this document are those of the authors and EPA does not endorse any products or commercial services mentioned in this publication.