GETTING THE MOST OUT OF A BUCKWHEAT COVER CROP AFTER EARLY VEGETABLES

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Managing post-harvest weeds and improving tilth are two common objectives that can be well accomplished by using a buckwheat cover crop. Our recent work has focused on how a vegetable grower can most easily achieve success with this cover crop even though it is planted at one of the busiest times of the growing season.

Buckwheat is useful after early vegetables because it has a short growing season (about 6 weeks), readily outcompetes weeds, is resistant to damage by insects and disease, and requires only moderate soil fertility. In fact buckwheat grain used to be a traditional follower of canning beans in rotations.

We determined the best tillage techniques for use of buckwheat as a cover crop after early vegetables in the northeastern U. S. Incorporating crop residue with a disk was necessary and provided sufficient tillage to obtain a weed-suppressive buckwheat stand. Buckwheat growth was stunted when direct seeded with a no-till drill immediately after pea harvest because the buckwheat roots did not penetrate the relatively hard soil. Plowing was not necessary even on a soil that might be described as "addicted to tillage." Planting buckwheat after incorporating the pea crop was successful; waiting 1 week to plant was optimal, whereas a 2-week wait produced a weaker stand and allowed weeds to begin growing. In wet years, immediate planting was fine.

We determined that optimal timing for sowing buckwheat in central New York was late June to early Aug. The last useful date is relatively early in the harvest season, which means that a shorter wait after incorporation is preferred.