

## Millet can build your garden soil

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No immediate plans for the old tomato patch or flower beds that are finished for the summer? Protect and improve the soil with a summer cover crop.

Choosing a good cover crop for North Florida involves some special considerations. First, it must establish and grow fast because we normally receive heavy rains during the summer that can wash away topsoil as well as compact what is left.

You don't want a cover crop that becomes a weed, competing with what you are trying to grow. You should be able to mow it down and plant, allowing the clippings to act as mulch. Or it should be easily tilled into the soil.

Small grains are recommended for cover crops, including oats, wheat, rye and ryegrass. These are, however, cool-season crops in our region. They are planted in the fall rather than summer.

Millet is a small grain that fills the bill when there is a need for a summer cover crop. It is quick to germinate and grow when there is adequate moisture and warm soil. It will reach a mature height during the summer within about six weeks. Once it matures, it turns brown and can be left standing or mowed down for a second planting. This can be repeated until temperatures drop in the fall.

A good stand of millet protects the soil surface from the impact of hard rains, while the fibrous root system protects the soil from erosion.



Brown top millet is most often used. It grows to a maximum height of about 2 feet. Pearl millet grows taller and produces a seed stalk that is 3 to 4 feet in height.

To establish millet, till the soil well and rake to prepare a fine seed bed. Broadcast seed uniformly at a rate of one pound per 1,000 square feet of area.

Rake again to cover most of the seed with one-quarter inch of soil. Keep the seed bed moist to a depth of 2 to 3 inches until germination occurs. Lightly fertilize with a complete fertilizer such as 10-10-10 when plants are 2 to 3 inches tall.

### Question of the week

Q. Is it too late to plant tomatoes?

A. It is possible to grow fall tomatoes if plants are established in late July or early August. Be

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aware that pest pressure will be greater at this time of year.

Protect plants from foliage blights by using an approved tomato fungicide and watch for and control insects such as aphids, mites and caterpillars.

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*The photo is Tifleaf 3 Pearl Millet from the University of Georgia Extension.*

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