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It's turnip time again. As fall waxes, and the garden wanes, turnips take over. We sow them in many of our fields for a cover crop, along with crimson clover and buckwheat. If you want some, come up to Long Hungry Road and stop in. they are right below the blueberry patch, near the tall bamboo.

Version:1.0 StartHTML:0000000194 EndHTML:0000005296 StartFragment:0000002457
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Turnips have been grown by gardeners and farmers for so long that their origin is uncertain. Europe and Asia both have a long history of growing turnips. And Tennessee does, too.

We supply turnips and turnip greens to many folks who used to grow them but don't have a garden anymore. It was quite common for a farm to have a turnip patch in the fall, supplying both roots and greens for the family and neighbors.

Turnips are sown in late summer, between August 15th and September 15th. Ours are in a field where potatoes were grown earlier this year. About two pounds of seed are needed to broadcast onto an acre of land. A couple ounces are all you need for a family-sized patch of a 1000 square feet. (10'x100')

The seeds are tiny, so getting an even stand can be tricky. But we have our own tricks. I mix a few handfuls with a bucket of buckwheat and toss it in a wide arch, high in the air, onto freshly worked soil. Then I firm it in with a cultipacker.

The frost has killed the tender buckwheat cover crop, whose white flowers graced the fields a

Turnip Time

Tuesday, November 1, 2011

few days ago. Buckwheat liberates and mobilizes calcium in the soil, making the lime more easily available for the next crop. I like to lime a field after potatoes and before I plant the buckwheat and turnips. Adding crimson clover gives you an April cover crop of bright red blooms.

Another trick is to mix a few ounces of turnip seed with a few gallons of sand. Mix it well, toss it in a clean garden bed and then rake over it. Turnips are easy to grow.

Turnips can be fed to livestock, cattle and pigs like them, and so do chickens, who love to peck at anything offered. I temporarily left a truckload of sweet potatoes in the barn during harvest, just to free up the truck. The next day we noticed that the top ones in the basket were "hen-pecked."

An 1863 book on vegetables lists 45 different varieties of turnips. Purple top is the common white one with pretty purple shoulders. We also grow yellow ones called Amber Globe and Gold Ball, and a pure white one from Japan called Shogoin.

Greens are good for you. We also grow a lot of kale and other greens. But turnips are the most popular locally, so we keep plenty around for our neighbors. We will pile some up in front of the shop in town, across from the new Head Start. Help yourself if you see someone there. It's a small way of saying thank you for all of the support our business has received from this community over the past 35 years.