

Turnips could be about the easiest crop we grow. Consequently, we plant a lot of them. They are both grown for greens and roots. There is an old saying “ The world is a turnip”, but I don’t know what it means. Sometime in August, when the fields are cleared of other crops, we sow turnip seed. I simply bushhog an old corn patch or whatever and then run the rebreaker through the ground. This sufficiently prepares the land for turnips.

I like to mix the turnips in a cover crop mixture with buckwheat and crimson clover. We use about an ounce of turnip seed to two double-handfuls of the crimson clover stirred into four gallons of buckwheat. This covers about ¼ of an acre. The buckwheat sprouts quickly, even in dry weather, and helps nurse the turnips along, keeping the field from getting weedy. Frost kills the buckwheat, and the field is covered in turnips, which in turn help nurse the crimson clover crop to bloom the following April.

Purple top is the most common variety, although many folks grow seven-top, which is just for the greens. We also have a white one called Amber Globe, and a red one named Scarlet Queen. The colors are pretty, but they all taste like turnips to me. I think turnips make nice decorations for a Christmas tree, which definitely puts me in the minority.

Turnips planted don’t do well. A late September planting is still too small. So I would guess the best time to plant them is near the middle of August. They make a good cover crop to be plowed back in for soil improvement. The pigs and cattle love to eat them, too.

Besides just greens, the roots are edible and a healthy addition to your diet. I like them raw, sometimes with a little salt. You can add them to soups and stews, also. the greens are quite nutritious and are a good way to soak up bacon grease or butter.

When your summer crops peter out, don’t leave the land bare. Invest a few quarters into turnip seeds and fill it up again. Soils love to have plants growing on them, and a turnips patch will keep the weeds down. They require no fertilizing, hoeing or mulching, just a toss of the hand and you’ll get a stand. What could be easier?