

BARLEY

COVER CROP FACT SHEET FOR IOWA

Barley (*Hordeum vulgare*) is a cool-season annual grass very good as a cover crop for reducing soil erosion and fighting compaction. Barley is a good choice for cover crop mixes to improve soil tilth and nutrient cycling.



Identifying Features

- » Blue-green leaves
- » Auricles are large, long, clasping and hairless
- » Leaf-sheath and blades are usually hairless
- » Scattered hairs on some barley varieties
- » Ligule is short and rounded

Cultural Traits

- » Winter annual grass
- » Minimum germination soil temperature: 35° F
- » Cold tolerance temperature: 0° F
- » Seeding date: Early August to Late September*

Planting Information*

- » **Drill** at ¾ - 1½ inches (60 lbs./acre PLS**)
- » **Broadcast** (66 lbs./acre PLS)
- » **Aerial** (75 lbs./acre PLS)

*Refer to Midwest Cover Crop Council (midwestcovercrops.org), local NRCS office recommendations, and/or pertinent financial assistance program requirements for location specific seeding dates and rates.

**Pure Live Seed

Additional planting information:

- » ~15,000 seeds/lb. (1 bushel = 48 pounds)
- » When planting on slopes or using barley for forage/ grazing, increase the seeding rate.
- » Broadcasting without incorporation is usually less dependable than drilling or broadcasting with incorporation.



Barley Seed



Seedling



Vegetative



Cover crop grass growth comparison

C:N (Carbon:Nitrogen) Ratio

- » Barley 20:1

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A cow grazes in a barley field.



Drilled barley grows in an Iowa crop field.

Performance

Dry matter = 2,000 - 5,000 lbs./acre per year
(Biomass quantity is dependent on planting and termination dates and precipitation.)

Performance Ratings

» Cash crop interseed (<i>early vegetative</i>)	Good
» Cash crop overseed (<i>late seed fill</i>)	Very good
» Grazing quality	Very good
» Mechanical forage harvest	Good
» Nitrogen fixer	NA
» Nitrogen scavenger	Very good
» Weed suppression	Good
» Compaction fighter	Very good
» Erosion control	Very good
» Lasting residue	Good
» Quick grower	Very good
» Drought tolerance	Very good
» Low fertility tolerance	Very good
» Shade tolerance	Good

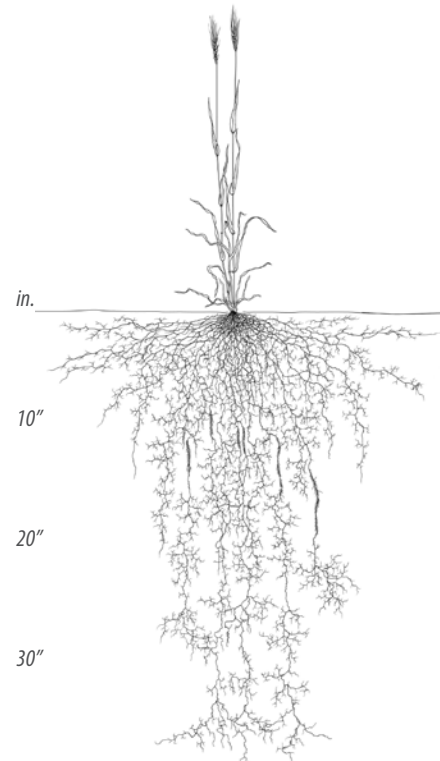
Potential Issues

- » **Increased pest pressure:** Barley could increase the risk of black cutworm and armyworm; risk of green bridge increasing pythium seedling disease; and is a host for penetrans root lesion nematode.
- » **Termination:** Time cover crop termination based on goals and experience level. To reduce potential negative impacts on cash crops, consider terminating earlier in the season when conditions

are dry or when green bridge or nitrogen tie-up are a concern. For crop insurance compliance, follow NRCS cover crop termination guidelines.

- » Early season nitrogen applications to corn can help reduce the effects of nitrogen tie-up by the cover crops.

Barley Plant and Root Structure



Drawing provided by Conservation Cropping Systems Initiative (ccsin.org)

This fact sheet is a collaborative effort of USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and Iowa State University Extension and Outreach to provide cover crop options and information for Iowa landowners.