

TILLAGE

August 2022

Winter oilseed rape

Edited by
Shay Phelan,
Tillage Specialist

The area of winter oilseed rape increased significantly by 44% in 2022. Many growers are now seeing the benefits of including it in the farm crop rotation, as it is an ideal break from cereal rotations and is a good entry for first wheats. Other benefits include spreading the workload, soil structure improvement, and it can be used to control difficult grass weeds. Again in 2022, many growers were able to reduce the amount of nitrogen (N) required to grow the crop. This was a significant saving this year given the costs of fertilisers. Early drilling is essential for growing oilseed rape. August-drilled crops generally perform better than September-drilled ones and it may be easier to prevent pigeon grazing of large canopies, which in turn will reduce the amount of N needed. The following tips are a useful guide when growing oilseed rape crops.

Sowing date: mid August to early September, ideally before September 10; however, seedbed quality, i.e., fine and firm, is as important as the sowing date.

Variety: the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM) Recommended Winter Oilseed Rape (WOSR) list is the best source of information on the main varieties.

Conventional varieties or hybrids can be sown in August but in September, you should only use hybrids. Look for varieties with good traits such as light leaf spot resistance and pod shatter resistance.

Seeding rate: sow 60-80 seeds/m² to establish 30-50 plants/m² in the spring. Varietal differences in vigour and thousand seed weight, along with seedbed condition and sowing date must be accounted for. Poor seedbed and late sowing will need higher (10%) seeding rates.

Weed control: field history is important as pre-emerge weed control is still the most effective. Volunteer cereals, cleavers and grass weeds are the main competitive weeds, and do most of their damage early in the crop's growth. Apply pre-emergence or early post-emergence treatments. Options include Butisan S/Rapsan 500 (1.5L/ha) or Katamaran Turbo (2.0-2.5L/ha) within 48 hours of sowing.

Clearfield varieties offer an opportunity to grow oilseed rape in fields where brassica weeds such as charlock, hedge mustard, etc., are a problem. The herbicide Cleranda is specially developed for Clearfield varieties and not only does it control charlock, it also controls groundsel, fumitory, poppy and speedwells. However, Cleranda can only be used on Clearfield hybrid varieties.

Post-harvest stubble management

The new Nitrates Directive rules on stubble cultivations are now in place and all growers need to be aware of the requirements. Failure to adhere to the rules may lead to financial penalties on your Basic Payment Scheme (BPS).

Whether or not you agree with the timeframes for the stubble cultivations as they are written, they should still be seen as very useful integrated pest management (IPM) tools to control weeds. There has been a significant increase in the cases of problem grass weeds like bromes, wild oats and blackgrass being reported to Teagasc advisors again in 2022. Stubble cultivations are the first step in the control of many grass weeds, as the reliance on herbicides is not achieving adequate control on some farms. I was on a farm in the UK this year where the grower was spending up to £150 per acre every year on various herbicides trying to control grass weeds, mainly blackgrass. A full IPM approach including crop rotation, roguing, stubble cultivations, machinery hygiene,

herbicides and possibly grass ley, has to be considered to eliminate the problem, as using herbicides alone is not the answer.

Shallow cultivations, no deeper than 2cm, will encourage up to 80-90% of sterile brome and blackgrass seeds to germinate. Be careful not to cultivate too deep as this can induce dormancy in some weed seeds and delay germination until next season.

It is also vitally important to identify the particular grass weed that you are trying to encourage to grow, as meadow brome needs exposure to light for a period of time in order to break dormancy, whereas sterile brome needs to be covered to break dormancy.

Headlands can often be the original source of weeds, particularly grass weeds, so it is vital for good control that headlands are cultivated as well as the centre of the field. Headlands should be cultivated last and also avoid dropping the cultivator on the headland and then driving into the field as this may drag the weed seeds or rhizomes out into the field. Consider turning before the tramlines to avoid this.

Catch crops

One of the key factors in growing good catch crops is early drilling, as August-planted crops always perform better than September crops. Target fields that were cleared early (e.g., winter barley) and get crops established. Be aware that crops like mustard will grow quite quickly and become stemmy, so leave these until later in the month. Green Low-carbon Agri-environment Scheme (GLAS) catch crops can be sown up to September 15, using light cultivation techniques – ploughing is not allowed. Remember catch crops in GLAS can only be grazed after December 1 and that two separate species must be sown. Avoid brassica species such as fodder rape, leafy turnip, etc., where oilseed rape is already in the farm crop rotation, as these will increase the possibility of getting diseases like sclerotinia and club root in following oilseed rape crops (Table 1). There have been a number of cases of club root in oilseed rape crops this year, probably as a result

of other brassica species being grown too frequently in the rotation.

Outside of GLAS, there are other options such as redstart (a hybrid brassica), stubble turnips, or even kale, although yields will not be as high as June/July-sown crops.



Club root in oilseed rape following multiple brassica cover crops.

Table 1: Seed rates for catch/cover crops in GLAS.

Species	Seeding	Ecological Focus Area (EFA)	GLAS 3	Nitrogen (N)
		No set rate. Suggested rate (kg/ha)	Prescribed rates (kg/ha)	
Brassicas	Forage/fodder rape	3	3-5	Will trap existing N
	Leafy turnip	3	5	
	Tillage radish	6-8	5	
	Mustard	8-10	6-10	
Legumes	Berseem clover	10-15	10-15	Will trap and add N
	Crimson clover	10-15	10-15	
	Vetch	50	12	Will add N
	Peas	80-100	30	
	Beans	150	90-100	
Grasses and cereals	Rye	70-90	65-80	Will trap existing N
	Oats (and black oats)	70-80	75-100	
Other	Phacelia	5-7	2-5	Will trap existing N
	Buckwheat	40	30-40	

National Crops Forum

The annual National Crops Forum webinar provides an ideal opportunity for farmers to assess the season just gone and also look forward to options for next season. Winter

cereal varieties, crop agronomy, crop recording systems and Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) reform options will be key topics.

Date: Thursday, September 8, 2022

Time: 2.00pm

Planning for Harvest 2023

As harvest 2022 winds up, growers should turn their attention to the crops for 2023, as the new CAP reforms will be in place next year and this will have an impact on tillage farms. The new Agri-Climate Rural Environment Scheme (ACRES) will be in place before the end of the year and there are options there that may or may not suit each individual farm.

Over the coming weeks, you should sit down with your advisor and plan your strategy for autumn drilling. Take into account issues such

as fertiliser and input costs, crop performance in 2022 (e.g., why some winter barley crops performed so poorly), and the options open to tillage farmers in the new schemes before deciding what crops and what areas to plant this autumn. With markets so volatile at the moment, many growers have expressed nervousness about the prospects for 2023; therefore, it is vitally important to plan out your cropping for the coming season and put in place a strategy that reduces the risks. This may involve forward selling some grain and forward buying some fertiliser if you think there is value to be had.

HEALTH & SAFETY

Take care with machinery

August is harvest month with a lot of machinery movement on farms and on public roads, including trailers, balers and silage gear. Machinery movement brings danger, particularly to bystanders including children and older farmers. A vehicle travelling at a walking speed of 5km/hour travels at 1.4 metres per second. Being struck by a machine causes bystander deaths and injuries due to the impact force.

In August also, a lot of use is made of powered machines, so make sure moving parts are guarded. This applies particularly to machines used in a stationary position, like augers and slurry tanker drive shafts. Entanglement in a machine moving part leads to horrific injuries. Children are 'out and about' in August enjoying the summer before the return to school, so continued farm safety measures are necessary.

