

# Oregon Annual Ryegrass

## Terminating Annual Ryegrass

“Annual ryegrass gets a bad rap because of problems some people have had killing it,” says Indiana farmer Mike Starkey, who has used annual ryegrass for at least ten years. “I had initial problems, too, when I started using annual ryegrass ten years ago. But you can kill annual ryegrass successfully by following these simple guidelines:

- **Be patient. If you haven’t mowed your lawn twice, it’s too early to spray.**
- **Make sure the annual ryegrass is actively growing so the glyphosate translocates into the roots.**
- **You need three consecutive nights when the overnight low is 50 degrees or greater before spraying.**
- **Spray after a rain, if possible, but definitely when the sun is shining.**
- **Spray between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m., then shut down the sprayer.**
- **Use a buffering agent to lower the pH of the water to four or less.**

“I like a named brand – instead of generic glyphosate – because of the surfactant it contains,” Starkey says. “I also use a buffering agent to lower the pH of the water to four or less. A buffering agent lowers the pH of the water I use to 2.5 or less. I do not use AMS.”

**Starkey seeds cover crops on all his no-till corn and soybean acres, weather and harvest permitting.**



“The keys to successfully terminating annual ryegrass include making sure it’s actively growing,” says John Werries. He and his son, Dean, operate Werries Farms LLC, Chapin, Illinois. “If your yard doesn’t need to be mowed – and not just because your wife tells you to! – it’s not time to start spraying your annual ryegrass.

Don’t start spraying too early in the morning and don’t spray too late in the afternoon. We use citric acid to lower the pH of the water to 5.5 or less. Our water from the city is 6.8. When we used a buffering agent to lower the pH in the spring of 2014 and 2015, we had a 100 percent kill.

**Werries Farms strip-tills all of its corn; about 90 percent of it is corn-on-corn.**

*For more information, including a detailed management guide for ryegrass as a cover crop, check the website of the Oregon Ryegrass Growers Seed Commission:*

**RyegrassCovercrop.com**



### Mike Starkey: Annual Ryegrass is His Cover Crop of Choice

Some people ask me if it's worth using annual ryegrass because of the management guidelines you need to follow. My answer, is "Yes," because it has multiple benefits.

I've been using annual ryegrass as my cover crop of choice for at least ten years. Annual ryegrass has the biggest root mass of any cover crop. The roots can go down 36 to 48 inches deep.

Those annual ryegrass roots scavenge a lot of nitrogen, which gets released later in the growing season. That's a big benefit for corn because racehorse hybrids need a lot of nitrogen through August and into September.

Annual ryegrass is great at suppressing hard-to-control weeds like giant ragweed.

It mixes nicely with other seeds like Dwarf Essex Rape, a brassica that can replace radishes. Annual ryegrass and Dwarf Essex Rape go dormant in the winter and resume growing in the spring. That spring growth gets the soil biology cooking.



**Mike Starkey**  
*M & J Starkey Farms  
Brownsburg, Indiana*

### John Werries: Cover Cropping Since 2012

We've been using annual ryegrass as a cover crop since the fall of 2012, when we also began selling cover crops.

The owners of the Oregon seed company we got ryegrass from strongly advised us several times to start with 40 acres. I said I was going to seed all our acres – about 3,800 – with ryegrass. I was 65 in 2012, which was my 48<sup>th</sup> growing season. I said I wasn't going to experiment with a small acreage. I needed to get with it.

Between our ground and custom work in 2012, we did 7,500 acres (of cover crops) that fall, with someone drilling the ryegrass right after the corn was combined.

I hate erosion. We think annual ryegrass had the best root system of any cover crop. It's amazing to see the roots that it puts down.



**John Werries**  
*John Werries & Sons  
Chapin, Illinois*



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