

Our LAND



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How About Companion Crops? -- The usual way of seeding legumes and grasses in Minnesota is with a spring-sown companion or "nurse" crop, says A. R. Schmid, agronomist at the University of Minnesota. This provides some return while legumes and grasses are getting started. At the same time, it helps control weeds. However, the companion crop's competition for enough light, moisture and nutrients often results in stand failures. Flax is a companion crop that shades the new seeding the least, Schmid says. To reduce competition of oats, barley and wheat with the legume or grass seed only a half to two-thirds of the usual rate. This will lower grain yields very little.

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Advance or Arrowhead Sunflowers Recommended -- If you want seed for winter-feeding birds, grow Advance or Arrowhead sunflowers, says R. G. Robinson, University of Minnesota agronomist. They grow about four-and-a-half feet tall and mature early. Commercial producers harvest with a combine, but small patches can be harvested by hand or left for birds to "harvest". If you plan to leave them for "birding down", you may wish to grow some of the small-seeded Sunrise and large-seeded Mennonite varieties. They will lengthen the feeding season because birds prefer small-seeded varieties and leave large-seeded sunflowers until last. You can buy sunflower seed in October when large quantities are on sale around Fosston and McIntosh in East Polk County.

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Poorly Drained Soil is Low Producer -- Crops in poorly drained soil in which only the top few inches get any air or oxygen, won't respond to commercial fertilizer. They can't. According to Charles Simkins, Extension soils specialist at University Farm, lack of oxygen causes suffocation or poisoning in plant roots. First-rate results from fertilizer can be expected only when your soil is well-drained and in good "health" -- with good tilth and structure. Carefully planned drainage has done wonders for hundreds of Minnesota farms--it can do the same for yours, if you have excess water problems.

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Here's a True Quickie -- How you farm these days may decide if you farm in the future--and how profitably you farm.