

Tarpping for Reduced Tillage in Small-Scale Vegetable Systems

Winter 2020 Reflections: Applications

How did you use tarps on your farm this year?
To hold in nutrients over winter, to preserve prepped beds between prep and planting
Used to stale seedbed for 1-3 weeks before planting crops (mostly for baby leaf greens). Managing cover crop debris.
Bed prep prior to direct seeding. One block is tarped for the winter for early onion transplants.
Protecting bare soil over winter then planting into soil no till in the spring. Tilling then tarping for a couple weeks in the spring and summer to kill annual weeds. Tarping after harvesting crops to kill weeds.
Used for successions of salad greens, namely arugula and mesclun
We tarped a section of the farm in the early spring of 2020 that had gotten pretty weedy in 2019 to try to reduce weed pressure before planting.
Tarped on 20 ft of empty beds planned for perennials in fall. Now have 200 ft. of 4 mil black plastic on weedy beds planned for annual planting in May 2021.
I put a rather large tarp on a field I had not been using, thinking I could leave it on summer, fall and over the winter and use it in the spring. I did plant some seedling trees along one side and cut holes in the other side to plant other seedling trees. I found that the weeds did not die over the fall and winter.
We used tarps to kill winter rye in the Spring. We have been doing this for several years now and it works well. We also have a silage tarp in the field now on an area that is currently grass and will be beds next spring.
Cover cropped two 120ft long 3ft wide beds in buckwheat/scythed/left residue and tarped for 2 months/used stirrup hoe to lightly cultivate beds and then laid drip and covered with new tarps with holes spaced for transplants. This enables us to have 2 beds ready to go for Spring. Tarp will be left until May, then cultivate enough to ensure weed-free beds and apply thick layer of compost prior to using the area for summer flower production.
Tarped a 20ft x 120ft area that had been in flower production primarily to kill remaining weeds and rot crop residues.
Tarped two 120x3 foot beds are currently in winter rye. We will scythe and mow then tarp over the summer to plan to prep the beds for use the next year.
Big opaque tarps to kill cover crops and stale seed bed. 3' wide permeable landscape fabric strips to stale seed bed on ground where we have living mulch paths.
Overwinter for nutrient retention, early spring as raincoats, summer for weed control
We used 100' tarps for weed suppression prior to plantings and 4' tarps on our fixed raised beds (both silage and landscape fabric) to break down crops and flip beds. Tarping between crops on our raised beds definitely broke down the material in short order. Landscape fabric seemed to work fine and was easier to work with. Next year I'll pay more attention and see if there's much of a difference between the two.
Cover for fields to be planted later in season or next year.
Smother cover crops, protect from rain event, overwinter protection
I have a series of plastic tarps covering an 80 ft bed to be planted with asparagus in the spring.
We cover cropped in early summer (buckwheat) and then mowed it mid-summer and tarped over the cover crop to reduce weed pressure and decrease tillage.

We tarped ground that was in our no-till cut flower field during the spring before planting.
In March, we put down four large, thick black tarps, covering about 3/4 of an acre. It was put on top of a short growth of winter rye.
We attempted to kill off volunteer Comfrey in an abandoned herb garden. Tarp was down from late June through late August. It looked successful when we removed the tarp but the comfrey has all come back. Probably should have been tarped for 4 months to kill comfrey.
We tarped a grass/clover field on September 1 to see if it might be ready to plant next spring. Possibly. But when I looked under the tarp on December 1 there was still a tiny bit of green and the roots were still more established than I hoped they would be. We plan to begin tarping two weeks earlier this next year.
We used tarps to open up new portions of our field, using tarps instead of doing ANY plowing or disking, then seeded to rye.
We use tarps throughout the season to kill off debris from previous crops and make the soil ready for bed prep and additional plantings/seedings.
We use tarps to "hold" sections of the field - preventing weeds from growing until we are ready to do bed prep.
We composted, fertilized and bedded up a 30' by 50' field in mid-November of 2019 and covered it immediately with a tarp. We wanted to see if we could roll back the tarp a few beds at a time and direct sow Spinach in mid-March of 2020 (about three weeks before we can traditionally sow outdoors in this climate.) The soil was dry and thawed and this trial was a success.
Tarped raised beds in late fall to overwinter and kill weeds. tarped in tiny hoophouse between crops of lettuce/greens to kill weeds
Plastic on new area to kill pasture grass for planting. Landscape fabric under electric fencing and between brassica plantings as no till.
Put on a 200' long field, as wide as the tarp. Put over freshly bush-hogged rye (almost mature heads) on a cover-cropped field. Stems poked through tarp a little. Kept on through summer and removed to work the field for another cover crop (rye and vetch) before intended late summer veggies in 2021.