

Catch crops: a portrait

Phacelia



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Phacelia tanacetifolia

Family: The Borage family

Subfamily: Waterleaf family

Genus: Phacelia

Species: Lacy phacelia

Weight of one thousand seeds: 2 g

Height: 20-120 cm

Sowing rate: 10-16 kg/ha

number of chromosomes: 2n = 22

This plant is also known by the common names lacy phacelia, blue tansy or purple tansy. The genus phacelia is native to the American continent. There are different phacelia varieties in North and South America. Overall, genus phacelia has approx. 200 species, only a few of which are of economic significance and cultivated. Phacelia tanacetifolia plays a key role in agriculture (see page 94 for available varieties etc.). In Germany, wild phacelia can sometimes be found at roadsides or on fallow or gravel surfaces. These plants usually originate from wasted seeds. Since phacelia is not hardy, wide dissemination in Central and Northern Europe is ruled out. Wild stocks disappear quickly in most cases.

In Central Europe, phacelia tanacetifolia is often cultivated as bee pasture. It is a high yield nectar source, comparable to rapeseed or buckwheat. In the summer months, flowering phacelia is always visited by a lot of bees, bumblebees and other insects. Under favourable conditions, bees can produce up to 1 l honey per year from 20 m² crop area.



Phacelia is very popular with insects that collect nectar



Bees produce tasty honey from the nectar of phacelia

Phacelia is also very suitable as green manure. With its dense root system, it is well suited to utilising the nutrients in the soil and passing them on to succeeding crops after it has decomposed. It leaves behind a dense root mass in a mellow topsoil. Its delicate leaves ensure excellent ground shading and effective weed suppression. The high amounts of organic material that remain in the soil maintain or increase the humus content and thus the productivity of the soil. Overall, phacelia preserves the soil structure and helps to maintain its fertility. For these reasons, it is also commonly used in catch crop mixtures.



Phacelia JULIA in a pure stand

The stocks generally freeze at temperatures below -5 °C and are destroyed. Rotational crops that are vulnerable to erosion, such as sugar beets, can be sown directly into the plant residues using strip-till or no-till.



Phacelia BALO as a component of the TERRA GOLD® TG-1 Humus mixture