

Oilseed rape rotations and establishment

Following on from Publication 1 ([The Role of Major Nutrients in Oilseed Rape](#)), this publication looks at the importance of finding the right place in your rotation for Oilseed Rape and foundations to consider for successful establishment.



Rotation

- At least 1 in 4 years, longer where clubroot is present. Clubroot spores can survive in soil for many years, so short rotations can steadily increase risk.
- Remember: swede, turnip, mustard and other brassicas can also contribute to clubroot pressure.
- Avoid spreading clubroot around the farm on contaminated soil and machinery, clean machinery before moving to clean ground.



Give OSR enough space in the rotation to protect yield potential and reduce disease pressure.



The Right Field

- OSR generally fits well after winter or spring cereals, but what does the previous crop leave behind?
- Look for: good soil structure, low compaction and good drainage. OSR dislikes wet feet. Wet compacted soils can also increase clubroot risk.
- Check soil pH. Acidic soils increase the risk and severity of clubroot.



Dig soil pits, assess soil structure, get soil analysed regularly and address deficiencies to protect yield.



Moisture

- OSR seed needs to absorb around 40% of its weight in water to initiate germination.
- Dry conditions at drilling can result in slow, patchy establishment and leave small plants less able to cope with pests and disease.
- Drill when conditions are right. Aim for moist soil around the seed and good seed-to-soil contact.



Getting the balance right with soil moisture is particularly important with Scotland's increasingly variable summer and autumn weather.



Cultivation

- Direct drilling, min-till and conventional cultivation can all work – provided they create the right conditions for the seed and root system.
- Low-disturbance establishment - can help conserve moisture and protect soil structure, often suits lighter soils.
- Conventional cultivation - may be useful where soil structure needs correcting and for burying weeds and trash.



Aim for a firm, well-consolidated seedbed - choose an establishment method that works for the soil and conditions.



Drilling Date

- Sow into warm soils with some moisture available: ideally mid to late August. Adjust according to location, soil type and conditions.
- Earlier drilling – gives the crop more time to establish before winter, but longer period of disease and pest exposure.
- Later drilling – can work on sites with good establishment conditions, but may result in smaller plants going into winter and greater vulnerability to pests.



Strike a balance – drill when conditions give the crop the best chance – aim for rapid, even emergence.



Establishment

- Seed rate 40 – 60 seeds per m² at a depth of 2-3cm. Rate allows for winter losses. Consider higher rates if conditions less than ideal.
- Adequate nutrition – the right nutrients (N, P, K, S, B & Mg), in the right balance, at the right time to get rapid, even establishment.
- Monitor for weeds, pests and disease and use Integrated Pest Management wherever possible.



A strong OSR plant going into winter is your best insurance.