

SORGHUM-SUDANGRASS

COVER CROP FACT SHEET FOR IOWA

Sorghum-Sudangrass (*Sorghum bicolor* x *Sorghum bicolor* var. *sudanese*) is a quick growing summer annual grass used as a cover crop to scavenge excess nutrients in the soil, suppress weeds, and fight compaction.



Identifying Features

- » Leaves are similar to corn but with less leaf area and waxier surface
- » Leaves are hairless
- » Some varieties have a brown midrib

Cultural Traits

- » Summer annual grass
- » Minimum germination soil temperature: 65° F
- » Cold temperature tolerance: 32° F
- » Seeding date: Mid May to Early August*

Planting Information

- » **Drill** at ¾ - 1½ inches (15 lbs./acre PLS**)
- » **Broadcast** (17 lbs./acre PLS)
- » **Aerial** is not recommended

*Planting information from Midwest Cover Crop Council (midwestcovercrops.org). Refer to local NRCS office recommendations (Iowa Field Office Technical Guide, Section 4, 340 Cover Crop) for seeding dates and rates pertinent to location specific financial assistance program requirements.

**Pure Live Seed

Additional planting information:

- » ~18,000 seeds/lb.
- » increase the seeding rate when using for forage/grazing,
- » If applying manure, tend toward lower end of the seeding rate.



Sorghum-Sudangrass Seed



Seedling



Growing Sorghum-Sudangrass



Strip of sorghum-sudangrass

C:N (Carbon:Nitrogen) Ratio

- » Sorghum-Sudangrass 10:1 to 30:1

SORGHUM-SUDANGRASS COVER CROP FACT SHEET



Cow/Calf pairs graze sorghum-sudangrass. (No-Till Farmer)



Sorghum-Sudangrass emerging. (Purdue University)

Performance

Dry matter = 4,000 - 8,000 lbs./acre per year
(Biomass quantity is dependent on planting and termination dates and precipitation.)

Performance Ratings

» Cash crop interseed (<i>early vegetative</i>)	Poor
» Cash crop overseed (<i>late seed fill</i>)	Poor
» Grazing quality	Excellent
» Mechanical forage harvest	Excellent
» Nitrogen fixer	N/A
» Nitrogen scavenger	Excellent
» Weed suppression	Excellent
» Compaction fighter	Excellent
» Erosion control	Very good
» Lasting residue	Excellent
» Quick grower	Excellent
» Drought tolerance	Very good
» Low fertility tolerance	Good
» Shade tolerance	Poor

Additional Considerations

- » Does not tolerate shade, flooding, or ponding.
- » Well-suited for grazing and wildlife.
- » Sorghum-sudangrass can cause prussic acid poisoning in livestock. Do not graze until at least 18-24 inches.
- » Mowing to a height of less than 2 inches after 2 feet or more of growth may terminate. Mowing after heading may terminate.



This fact sheet is a collaborative effort of USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and Iowa State University Extension and Outreach to provide cover crop options and information for Iowa landowners.