

SUDANGRASS

COVER CROP FACT SHEET FOR IOWA

Sudangrass (*Sorghum bicolor*) is a summer annual grass that is an excellent cover crop for scavenging excess nitrogen, suppressing weeds, fighting soil compaction, and providing supplemental livestock grazing.



Identifying Features

- » Annual bunchgrass
- » Leaves are hairless with a waxy surface
- » Fine stems
- » Wide leaves that resemble corn

Cultural Traits

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

Planting Information*

- » **Drill** at ¾ - 1½- inch (15 lbs./acre PLS**)
- » **Broadcast** (17 lbs./acre PLS)
- » **Aerial** (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:

- » ~30,000 seeds/lb.
- » Increase seeding rate if using for forage/grazing.
- » Sudangrass can tolerate low fertility soils better than Forage Sorghum and Sorghum-Sudangrass.



Sudangrass Seed



Sudangrass grain



Sudangrass beginning to flower



Sudangrass in a cover crop mix

C:N (Carbon:Nitrogen) Ratio

- » Sudangrass 50:1

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Sudangrass beginning to grow.



Sudangrass in a mix with buckwheat, peas, radishes, and others.

Performance

Dry matter = 500 - 6,000 lbs./acre per year
(Biomass quantity is dependent on planting and termination dates and precipitation.)

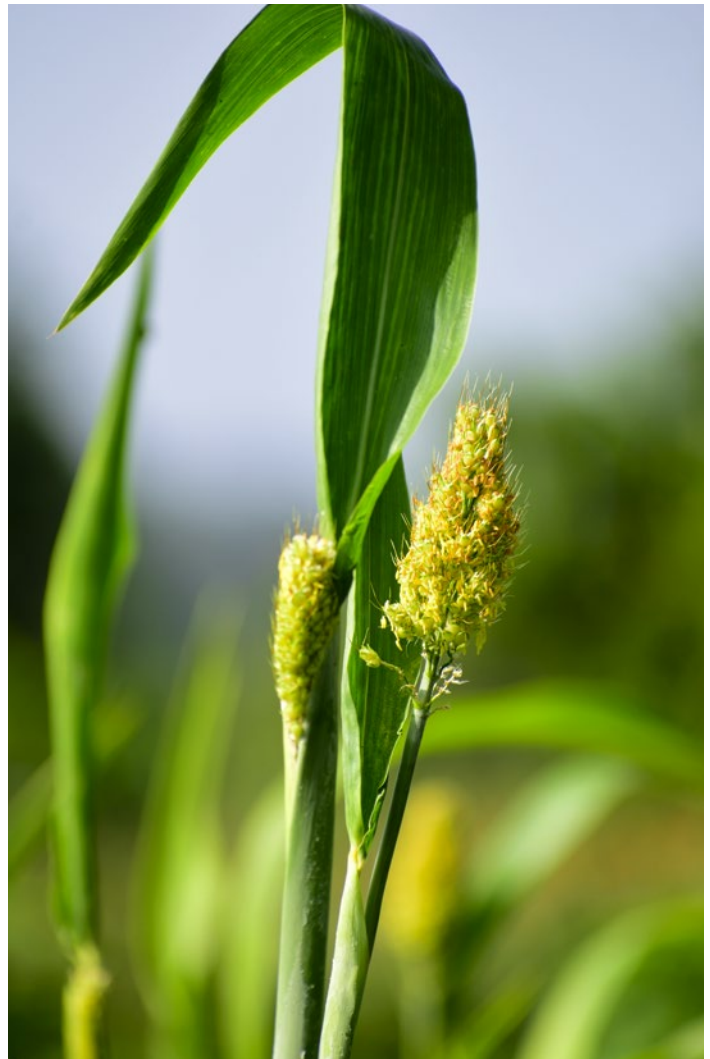
Performance Ratings

» 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

- » Sudangrass will winterkill easily.
- » Sudangrass is a non-host for soybean cyst nematode.
- » Sudangrass can cut multiple times per year for forage use.
- » Does not tolerate flooding, ponding, or shade.
- » Potential for prussic acid poisoning in livestock when plants are stressed by drought or freeze.
- » Do not graze until plants are at least 18 inches.

Sudangrass Leaves



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.