

# 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](http://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

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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                                 | Very good |
| » 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                               | Excellent |
| » 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.