

*Grasses*

# Sorghum-Sudangrass

## AS A COVER CROP IN OHIO

This fact sheet summarizes information specific to Ohio that is available from the Midwest Cover Crops Council. For more information, see the *Midwest Cover Crops Field Guide, Third Edition*, and the Cover Crop Selector Tool found at: [midwestcovercrops.org/selector-tool/](https://midwestcovercrops.org/selector-tool/)



Photo credit: Rachel Cochran, OSU Extension

*Sorghum bicolor x Sorghum bicolor var. sudanese*

### Identification Information

- Leaves that resemble corn but have less leaf area and a waxier leaf surface
- Have more secondary roots than a corn plant
- Brown midrib available on some hybrids

### Cultural Traits

- Summer annual
- Minimum germination temperature: 65 °F
- Reliable establishment window (state average): May 20–Sept. 6
- Upright growth habit: 8–12 feet
- Preferred soil pH: 6.0–7.0

**Heat tolerance:** Excellent

**Drought tolerance:** Excellent

**Low fertility tolerance:** Good

**Winter survival:** Winter-killed

Individuals participating in financial assistance programs are required to follow NRCS Appendix A regarding seeding rates and dates. Failure to do so will jeopardize payments. Appendix A can be found in Ohio's Field Office Technical Guide, Section 4, Ecological Sciences Tools: <https://efotg.sc.egov.usda.gov/#/state/OH/documents/section=4&folder=-6>

### Planting Information

- Drilled at ½–1½ inches
  - 16–30 lbs./acre (pure live seed)
- Broadcast with shallow incorporation
  - 18–30 lbs./acre (pure live seed)
- Broadcast without incorporation is not recommended.

*Additional planting information:*

- 17,280 seeds/lb.
- When planting on slopes or using for forage/grazing, increase seeding rate.
- If applying manure, tend toward the lower end of the seeding rate.

### Performance

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

**Nitrogen scavenger:** Excellent

**Soil builder:** Excellent

**Erosion fighter:** Excellent

**Weed fighter:** Excellent

**Grazing:** Very good

**Quick growth:** Excellent

**Lasting residue:** Very good

**Mechanical forage harvest:** Excellent



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### Termination Information

- Tillage
  - If terminating with only tillage, multiple passes are often required.
- Chemical
- Winterkill

#### Additional termination information:

- Mowing to a height of less than 2 inches after 2 feet or more of growth may terminate.
- Mowing after heading may terminate.
- Follow NRCS guidelines for cover crop termination dates for crop insurance compliance.

#### Additional performance information:

- Sorghum-sudangrass does not tolerate shade, flooding, or ponding.
- Rapid growth is good for short windows.
- Do not mow closer than 6 inches to soil surface to ensure regrowth.
- Brown midrib hybrids are available for higher forage value.
- Vertical structure, very edible forage, and seed production are well suited for grazing and wildlife.
- Sorghum-sudangrass can cause prussic acid poisoning in livestock.
  - Do not graze until at least 18–36 inches.
- Drought-stressed plants can cause nitrate poisoning.
- Mowing or harvesting promotes tillering and increases root growth.
- Specific hybrids may be used to manage penetrans root lesion nematode.
- Mature, frost-killed plants become woody.
- If allowed to go to seed, sorghum-sudangrass has the potential to become a weed.
- Do not plant in fields with a known Johnsongrass population.

### OTHER

Attracts beneficials:	Good
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Bears traffic:	Very good
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Short windows:	Excellent
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### Potential Disadvantages

**Increased weed potential:** Could be a minor problem

**Increased insects/nematodes:** Occasionally a minor problem

**Hinders crops:** Could be a moderate problem

- Can cause negative rotation effects for following grass crops

**Mature incorporation challenges:** Could be a moderate problem

### Contributors

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(Note: This publication was adapted with consent from MCCC with content from the Midwest Cover Crops Field Guide, Third Edition, and Cover Crop Selector Tool: [midwestcovercrops.org/selector-tool/](http://midwestcovercrops.org/selector-tool/).)

The Midwest Cover Crops Council ([www.midwestcovercrops.org](http://www.midwestcovercrops.org)) aims to facilitate widespread adoption of cover crops throughout the Midwest by providing educational/outreach resources and programs, conducting new research, and communicating about cover crops to the public.

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### Potential Advantages

#### SOIL IMPACTS

Subsoiler:	Very good
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Frees P and K:	Good
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Compaction fighter:	Excellent
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Nematodes:	Very good
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Disease:	Very good
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Allelopathic:	Excellent
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Chokes weeds:	Excellent
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### OHIO COVER CROP FACT SHEET

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