



Sudangrass and Sorghum-Sudangrass

Sorghum bicolor

Sudangrass and Sorghum-Sudangrass are midsummer grasses suitable for short, 8 to 10 week plantings. Sorghum-sudangrass is often referred to generically as Sudex, although that is DeKalb’s trademarked name.



These grasses are the most heat and drought tolerant cover crops typically grown in the Northeast. Sudangrass growth is easier to manage because the stems are narrowerⁱ, it can be sown earlier than sorghum-sudangrass, and suppresses weeds better. These crops provide abundant root biomass, which is useful for increasing soil organic matter. Mowing encourages root growth. They suppress root knot nematodes,ⁱⁱ and weed germination if densely sown.

<i>Land Preparation</i>	Prepare a clod free seedbed. Avoid hard soil and wet spots. Do not plant just before a heavy rain.
<i>Seeding date</i>	June through mid-August (sudangrass) ⁱⁱⁱ July through mid August. (sorghum-sudangrass) These cover crops require warm soil to germinate.
<i>Seeding Rates</i>	30 lb/ac for biomass and nematode control 50 lb/ac for weed control. ^{iv} Seed size varies, so if using a variety with larger or smaller seed size than average, adjust the rate to provide a similar plant population. [SxS: 35-50 ^v . Recommended in another reference]
<i>Seed sources</i>	Albert Lea Seedhouse, Seedway, UAP, local farm seed dealers. To suppress nematodes, use a variety that is high in dhurrin (such as Trudan8, Sordan 79, Green Grazer and Special effort.) ^{vi}
<i>Maintenance</i>	Mow when 20 to 30 inches tall, leaving 6 inch stubble ^{vii} . Leave residue on the soil surface for weed suppression. Timely mowing is important because tall fibrous plants are difficult to mow or incorporate.

Control

Big crowns decompose slowly, making it difficult to prepare a seedbed for small-seeded crops. Incorporate sudangrass if planting something else in the fall. Otherwise, mow for winter-killed mulch on the surface and till in early spring.

Tips

Good summer cover if a long mid-summer period is available. Usually followed by a winter grain cover crop. For shorter summer opportunities, use buckwheat. This plant can be used in some insectary mixes because Sorghum may harbor greenbug (*Schizaphis graminum*), which in turn attracts lady beetles, lacewings, and other beneficial predatory insects.^{viii}

ⁱ Undersander, D. Sorghums, sudangrasses and sorghum sudangrass hybrids. Focus on Forage v. 5, no 5. <http://www.uwex.edu/ces/crops/uwforage/SorghumsFOF.htm>

ⁱⁱ Cover Crops for Vegetable Production in the Northeast, L.J. Stivers, et al. Information Bulletin 244, P.7.

ⁱⁱⁱ Pritts, M. Cover crops for blueberry plantings.
<http://www.fruit.cornell.edu/Berries/bbhtml/bbcovercrop.html>

^{iv} <http://www.nysaes.cornell.edu/hort/faculty/bjorkman/covercrops/earlysummer.html>

^v Pritts, M. Cover crops for blueberry plantings.
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^{vi} <http://www.nysaes.cornell.edu/hort/faculty/bjorkman/covercrops/earlysummer.html>

^{vii} Clark, A. 2007. Managing Cover Crops Profitably, 3rd ed., Sustainable Agriculture Network. p.108.

^{viii} <http://www.sarep.ucdavis.edu/cgi-bin/ccrop.exe>