

## Warm-Season Annual Forages

In years such as this, when wet weather delays corn planting, a farmer may have one or two fields that never get planted. Not wanting to “waste” this field, he may call me in late June or early July looking for a crop that he can plant on short notice. Often times, he may be thinking of a warm-season annual forage such as sudangrass, sorghum-sudangrass hybrids, or pearl millet. It’s not a bad idea. A farmer can always use some mid-summer grazing or additional hay for his cattle. Unfortunately, the window for planting these forages has usually already passed. Planting date range for warm-season annuals is from the first of May through mid-June with the ideal time being mid-May. It would make little sense to plant warm-season annuals instead of corn at this time because corn planted in mid-May is still capable of producing very well. In a pinch, however, some varieties of sorghum-sudangrass can be planted in late June, after the ideal planting date for corn is over. Before doing so, a farmer needs to consider any planting restrictions that may exist because of chemicals put down for corn. Here are a few more things to think about when considering warm-season annual forages:

- Although more tolerant of soil acidity and low fertility than other forages, warm-season annuals prefer a pH of 5.5 or higher and adequate levels of phosphorus and potassium.
- Nitrogen should be applied at establishment and after each cutting or grazing to maximize production.
- Sorghum-sudangrass and pearl millet should be grazed when the plant is 18-30 inches high and hayed when the plant is 36 inches high. Lowest cutting or grazing height is 8 inches.
- Sorghum-sudangrass may contain high levels of nitrate or prussic acid, especially during or after a drought.
- While pearl millet does not contain prussic acid, it levels of nitrate during drought conditions. All warm-season annuals should be tested for nitrate accumulation after dry weather.
- Grazing of sorghum-sudangrass should be delayed at least 14 days after a frost to avoid problems with prussic acid.

University of Missouri Extension Guide G4661 Warm-Season Annual Forage Crops has more details about these specific crops. Ask for it at your county extension office. Additional information is also available from regional agronomy or livestock specialists.