

## Summer Annual Forages

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With this year's long winter and slow pasture growth, many producers are interested in supplementing their forage supplies with summer annual crops such as pearl millet, sorghum-sudan or sudangrass. Picking out the species that is right for your operation can be an important one.

Before you plant your summer annual, make sure that soil temperatures have reached 60° and are rising, as these crops are fairly intolerant to cold temperatures. Although they can be seeded through the end of June, moisture availability can make establishment at this time tough, so planting between the middle and end of May is a good rule of thumb. Also check that phosphorus and potassium have been applied to soil test levels before planting.

Pearl millet is a tall grass that can withstand drought and low pH soils, making it a great option in areas with thin or poor soil. Pearl millet has relatively fine stems and a higher leaf-to-stem ratio than sudangrass or sorghum-sudan hybrids. When compared to the other summer annuals, pearl millet will not produce as much total biomass in a season and won't regrow as quickly following a harvest, but it also will not have prussic acid accumulation concerns like sudangrass or sorghum-sudan.

Sorghum-sudan hybrids are a fast growing crop that can produce exceptional amounts of forage. Sometimes referred to as Sudex, most available sorghum-sudan hybrids are brown mid rib varieties with a lower lignin content, making them more palatable to cattle. Of the summer annual crops, sorghum-sudan will produce the greatest amounts of tonnage, but the large amounts of forage will make drying difficult, meaning it will need to be put up as wet baleage or as green chop. It can accumulate both nitrates and prussic acid if it is stressed, and is less tolerant of poor soils and low fertility levels.

Sudangrass is a leafy, fine-stemmed grass that can regrow rapidly after harvest. Because it is leafier than the brown mid rib sorghum-sudan varieties, it is a better option for producing dry hay or for pasturing cattle. It will accumulate prussic acid after periods of drought or frost, so should not be grazed within two weeks of these events. Like pearl millet and sorghum-sudan, sudangrass can accumulate nitrates so cattle should be monitored before being allowed to graze it freely.

Other options such as forage sorghum, teffgrass and corn silage are also available and may work well for your operation. Before planting summer annual forages, take into consideration your soils, harvesting abilities and forage quality requirements. You can then make an informed decision on the summer annual crop that will work best for you.