Time is running out for planting an "emergency" forage crop

Stephen K. Barnhart
Iowa State University, sbarnhar@iastate.edu

Follow this and additional works at: http://lib.dr.iastate.edu/cropnews

Part of the Agricultural Science Commons, Agriculture Commons, and the Agronomy and Crop Sciences Commons


The Iowa State University Digital Repository provides access to Integrated Crop Management News for historical purposes only. Users are hereby notified that the content may be inaccurate, out of date, incomplete and/or may not meet the needs and requirements of the user. Users should make their own assessment of the information and whether it is suitable for their intended purpose. For current information on integrated crop management from Iowa State University Extension and Outreach, please visit https://crops.extension.iastate.edu/.
Time is running out for planting an "emergency" forage crop

Abstract
Weather events or unusual circumstances will sometimes lead to the decision to produce an "emergency" forage crop. The forage crop chosen often is a warm-season annual grass harvested one to three times during the growing season. The choice of crop species depends primarily on how the crop will be stored or used (hay, silage, or grazed), the type of animal being fed, and the yield expectations.

Keywords
Agronomy

Disciplines
Agricultural Science | Agriculture | Agronomy and Crop Sciences

This article is available at Iowa State University Digital Repository: http://lib.dr.iastate.edu/cropnews/1015
Time is running out for planting an "emergency" forage crop

by Stephen K. Barnhart, Department of Agronomy

Weather events or unusual circumstances will sometimes lead to the decision to produce an "emergency" forage crop. The forage crop chosen often is a warm-season annual grass harvested one to three times during the growing season. The choice of crop species depends primarily on how the crop will be stored or used (hay, silage, or grazed), the type of animal being fed, and the yield expectations.

Harvest as silage provides the widest range of species choices. Foxtail, Japanese, and hybrid pearl millets and sudangrass and sorghum-sudangrass hybrids can all be planted as late as mid-July and still produce a harvestable crop. All of these also could be considered as grazed forage too. Foxtail millet, sudangrass, and the sorghums should not be used for horse pasture. It is probably too late in the season to plant forage sorghum and expect a normal forage sorghum yield silage crop, and forage sorghum is not generally recommended as a grazing crop.

Choices for an emergency crop for harvest as dry hay are more limited. The best choice is probably foxtail millet. It is the most "grassy" of the millets and the best suited for drying and safe storage as dry hay. Sudangrass and Japanese millet also are possible choices for a hay crop but somewhat less desirable because of coarse stems and less uniform field curing.

Planning for and choosing an emergency forage crop may not be sufficient. For a successful midsummer planting, there needs to be adequate soil moisture to germinate the seed and a regular rainfall pattern for the remainder of the growing season to keep the crop growing.

Though often not considered, you may already have an emergency forage crop growing. Corn silage or soybeans harvested during early pod fill also are possible and viable forage choices; however, their value as grain must be weighed against their value and need for forage.

Livestock producers need to be aware of late summer nitrate toxicity risk with many grass forages growing during dry summer months. They also should be aware that hydrocyanic acid (Prussic acid) needs to be considered when managing sudangrass and the sorghums as pasture.
supply deficits in Iowa
July 9, 2007
Struggling alfalfa fields: Consider temporary forage options
May 14, 2007
Assessing freeze damage to alfalfa and management suggestions
April 16, 2007
Dry weather: Worried about high nitrates in forages?
July 10, 2006
Late-summer seeding of forage crops
June 26, 2006
Late spring fescue management considerations
June 5, 2006
Predictive equations of alfalfa quality (PEAQ)
May 1, 2006
Evaluating the spring alfalfa stand
April 3, 2006

Stephen K. Barnhart is a professor of agronomy with extension, teaching, and research responsibilities in forage production and management.

This article originally appeared on page 220 of the IC-498(18) -- July 9, 2007 issue.

Updated 07/27/2007 - 11:58am