

Switchgrass

- ◆ Earliest maturing warm-season grass
- ◆ Drought tolerant
- ◆ Salt tolerant
- ◆ Acid tolerant
- ◆ Provides good wildlife cover
- ◆ Excellent erosion control
- ◆ Sand stabilizer



5-7 PLS lbs/Acre

May—June



Switchgrass

DESCRIPTION

Switchgrass is a native, perennial, warm season sod-forming tall grass. It is most commonly found in prairie lowlands, but will grow under a wide range of climatic conditions. A thick stand of Switchgrass makes excellent winter and early spring wildlife cover because of its ability to remain in an upright position when covered with snow or ice. Many farmers prefer Switchgrass to other varieties of native grasses because of the hard seed coat that easily feeds through conventional seeders. A drought-resistant grass, it even produces well in the driest years. During the summer of 1988, a Missouri producer reported his Switchgrass hayed in mid-July yielded 6000 lbs. per acre, compared to fescue hayed in late May which produced barely 1000 lbs. per acre.

APPLICATION

The grass adapts to most sites with very little difficulty. Root systems that are extensive and deep allow the plant to reach for moisture in the driest years. This root system also allows that plant to tolerate extra moisture and inundation for short periods of time without seriously affecting the plant.

USES

Switchgrass provides excellent nesting and brood cover for upland birds. In the tall grass prairie region, Switchgrass is generally most abundant on low-lying areas that receive some upslope moisture. Switchgrass can be found growing in brackish water, on dunes along lakeshores, and in oak and pine savannas. It is tolerant of moderate soil salinity and acidity. Switchgrass can be found growing on sites that range from 4.5—7.6 pH.

SEEDING

Rates: 5-7 PLS lbs/Acre. on new seeding.

Depth: Plant the seed no more than 1/2 inch deep. Emerging seedlings lack the strength to push through too much overlying soil. More seed has been lost to poor planting practices than anything else; this is especially true of seed depth.

CULTURAL PRACTICES

Soil Preparation: For the best conservation practice, no-till the seed into the stubble of a previous crop or the existing stand of another species that has been successfully eradicated. Pay close attention to previous land use practices. If a row crop has been planted for many years in succession a herbicide carryover is possible. If you feel you must plow up the site before planting, prepare your seedbed like you would for any other crop. The seedbeds need to be firm, not fluffy, so the seed will not be planted at an inappropriate depth. Use a cultipacker to firm your seedbed or some other type of roller that will create a smooth planting area that is not too hard.

NPK requirement: We do not recommend the use of fertilizer the first year, at least not nitrogen. Moderate levels of phosphorus and potassium are beneficial, especially for root establishment, which is a primary activity of the plant the first year. Use a soil test to help you decide that. Fertilizer may be applied the second year to enhance vigor and production of forage. It is not necessary to fertilize at all, but stand strength may be compromised without it.

Weed Control: We recommend a controlled burn every 1-3 years if possible. If not, then a mowing pattern should be established in order to control woody species invasion and prevent thatch build up. If you mow, mow no lower than 8 inches and no later than August 1.

Grazing: If grazing, begin grazing when Switchgrass is 8-10 inches tall. Keep plant 8-16 inches in height. Then remove livestock for 30-45 days. Any re-growth can be grazed again, but no shorter than 8 inches.

IDENTIFICATION

Clum: Erect, 2-7 feet tall, usually unbranched above the base, glabrous, tough.

Blades: Elongated, flat, 4-24 inches long and sometimes longer, .2-.6 inches wide, with rough margins. There is a triangular patch of hair on the upper surface at the base.

Sheath: Shorter than the internodes, often reddish or purplish at the base.

Ligule: A dense ring of hair.

Inflorescence: Open, diffuse panicle, 6-20 inches long, ovate to pyramidal in shape, usually one third to one half as wide as long. Branches area ascending or spreading, with spikelets near the end.

Spikelets: Ovate, swollen, .1—.2 inches long, acuminate, prominently nerved, on short pedicels. Two-flowered, with the uppermost floret fertile and the lower floret sterile or staminate (containing only one stamen). No awns.



Area of Adaptation

