

## Foraging Around



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### Annual Forages: Is This the Year?

After an exceedingly dry spring most areas of the Northeast recently received soaking rains. And while these rains are extremely beneficial for all crops (unless you had hay lying in the swath or windrow), in many areas first cutting yields of perennial hay crop and both grain and straw yields of winter grains have already been hurt.

Thus, you may want to take a moment now to assess your 1986-87 feed needs. And if there's a chance you'll be short you can still plug annual forage crops into your 1986 cropping plans. These warm weather annual crops are normally not suitable for hay, but among the annuals there are crops that make it excellent supplemental pasture, green chop or silage. And they are heat tolerant and very productive when moisture and fertility are adequate.

Here's a brief run-down of your

choices:

Sudangrasses have finer stems and are usually higher in digestibility than the sorghum-sudangrass hybrids, but they are usually lower yielding. Piper Sudangrass, the most widely grown variety, is also the lowest in prussic acid potential, and is normally used for pasture. Hybrid sudangrasses, such as Beachley-Hardy's Monarch, produce somewhat more forage than Piper but also may have a slightly greater prussic acid potential. However, this difference is small and with good management the sudangrass hybrids are excellent for summer pasture as well as green chop and silage.

Sorghum-sudangrass hybrids such as RS II are usually much higher yielding than Piper and are used mostly in a green chop or silage situation. They do have a higher prussic acid potential and must be managed more carefully during the summer and fall.

These multi-harvest, warm-season annual grasses can be planted right now and will usually be ready for grazing or green chop about six to seven weeks after sowing. They can be no-till seeded in stubble or sod or drill planted on a prepared seedbed. In general, seeding rates of 30-35 pounds/acre for the sudangrasses or 35-45 pounds/acre for the sorghum-sudan hybrids are adequate.

Piper sudan can be grazed when it reaches a height of 18 inches (two feet is recommended for sudangrass hybrids) and if properly fertilized and managed these can be grazed two or three times during the growing season. The sorghum-sudan hybrids should reach a height of 2½ to three feet before grazing or chopping. At earlier stages the forage will be higher in quality but may contain excessive levels of prussic acid. If cut at a stubble height of five to six inches they will recover rapidly for a second crop.

Japanese millet is occasionally grown as an annual forage on the cold, poorly drained soils of northern Pennsylvania and New York while Pearl millet may be used in the lower mid-Atlantic regions.

However, these are generally considered inferior to the sudangrasses where the sudangrasses can be grown.

#### Brassica Crops - Another Alternative

During the past several years brassica crops (rape, kale, turnips, and swedes) have gained in popularity as supplemental summer grazing crops especially for sheep and beef, but also in some cases for dairy cows. A few farmers have also been successful ensiling rape, especially in plastic bags. Because of the succulent nature of rape, wilting before ensiling is an absolute must.

Rape and kale are leafy brassicas, while turnips and swedes are root crops with all parts (leaves, stems and roots) utilized by grazing animals. Rape and turnips reach their maximum yields (up to four tons dry matter/acres) between 90 and 120 days after planting. Thus, rape sown right now would be ready for grazing or chopping by early to mid-September and would be available for a second grazing in late fall. And unlike perennial forages, the quality of rape forage doesn't seem to decline with age.

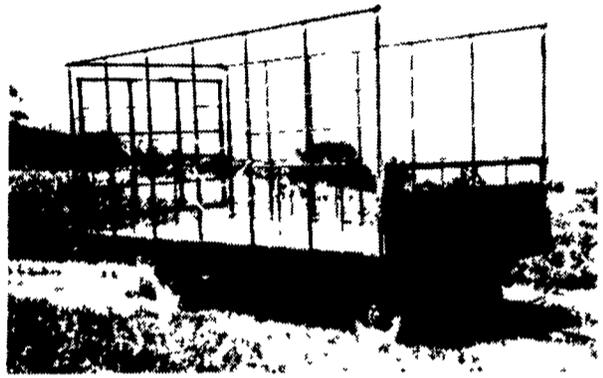
While there are several rape varieties available, Rangi appears to be the most productive and popular.

Swedes and kale require 150 to 180 days to reach maximum yields, up to six tons dry matter per acre. Plantings can be made in July for late fall grazing.

Brassica crops can be seeded on a prepared seedbed. But seeds are small, seeding rates are low (1½ to four pounds per acre depending on species) and seeding depth is critical. Thus, a good, firm seedbed as well as properly calibrated drills or seeders are a must. Excellent stands of brassicas have consistently been gotten with no-till seedings either in sod or stubble - with herbicides to suppress existing vegetation, a sound lime and fertility program including adequate nitrogen, and the use of new precision no-till drills to do the seeding. And pasture late into the fall has made those crops promising.

One caution: Seed of all of the above named crops is or can be made available. However, make your seed needs known early so your supplier can be sure to have your seed on hand.

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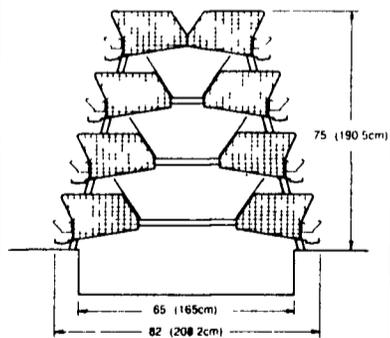
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