



What about growing switchgrass in Georgia?

*Dennis W. Hancock,
Extension Forage Agronomist,
Crop and Soil Sciences Department*

Switchgrass is native warm season perennial grass that can be very productive in Georgia. It has received a lot of attention as a potential bioenergy crop (either via lignocellulosic fermentation or gasification/direct combustion). However, switchgrass can also be an excellent plant to incorporate into wildlife habitat improvement zones. It can be used as a forage crop in Georgia, but more high quality forage per acre can be produced more economically from introduced warm season perennial grasses.

The University of Georgia now has a [website](#) that is solely dedicated to the management and use of switchgrass in Georgia. This website covers its use as a forage, bioenergy, and wildlife habitat crop. There are also a significant number of other publications that are helpful for those who intend to use switchgrass. The USDA's Plant Materials Center in Americus has some great fact sheets on switchgrass (and other native warm season perennial grasses), including some recommended varieties. Click on: <http://plant-materials.nrcs.usda.gov/gapmc/publications.html>, then look for **Plant Fact Sheets** for links to each individual species. Here's the direct link to one on switchgrass: <http://plant-materials.nrcs.usda.gov/pubs/gapmcfs04607.pdf>. Note: I recommend 5-6 lbs of PLS/acre (instead of what they recommend as 6-10 lbs) and seeded at a depth of ¼ to ½ an inch. Do not apply N fertilizer during establishment to prevent weeds from out competing the switchgrass seedlings. Establishment and weed control is discussed in the PMC's fact sheet mentioned above. Additional information on switchgrass management (particularly for wildlife habitat) can be found in a very good publication put out by the University of Tennessee (<http://www.utextension.utk.edu/publications/pbfiles/PB1746.pdf>). If bioenergy is the intended use, then there are some slightly different management considerations. ATTRA has published a good fact sheet on how to grow switchgrass for bioenergy. It is located here: http://attra.ncat.org/new_pubs/attra-pub/PDF/switchgrass.pdf?id=Georgia

It should be noted that the agronomic practices that are appropriate for switchgrass production in Georgia are still relatively unknown. Research projects are in early stages of development and modifications to these management recommendations will, no doubt, be made in the future.

Learning *for* Life

The University of Georgia and Ft. Valley State University, the U.S. Department of Agriculture and counties of the state cooperating. Cooperative Extension, the University of Georgia College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences, offers educational programs, assistance and materials to all people without regard to race, color, national origin, age, gender or disability.

An Equal Opportunity Employer/Affirmative Action Organization Committed to a Diverse Work Force

CSS-F031

June 2009

Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension work, Acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, The University of Georgia College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences and the U.S. Department of Agriculture cooperating.

J. Scott Angle, Dean and Director.