

10 Key Points in Switchgrass Production

1. **Site Selection and Preparation:** Switchgrass is easiest to establish on well drained soils that have previously been used for annual cropping. If the site is converted from long term perennial forages, make sure the perennial weeds are thoroughly killed in the late summer/ early fall of the previous year.
2. **Seed Source:** First time growers are best to source high quality seed of Cave-in-rock and plant at least 10/kg/ha.
3. **Seeding:** On conventionally tilled soils use of a Brillion seeder works well. No-till establishment can give equally good results. Make sure you pack the fields before and after planting.
4. **Use of a Nurse Crop or Direct Seed:** In Southern Ontario it is likely best to undersow switchgrass in spring wheat. A broadleaf herbicide such as Buctril M can be used for broadleaf weed control in the cereals. In cooler zones <2400 CHU, it is likely best to direct seed the crop and use atrazine pre-emergence.
5. **No First Year Harvest:** Do not harvest the switchgrass crop in the fall of the seeding year to ensure good winter survival.
6. **Fertilization:** Switchgrass does not generally require fertilizer in the seeding year. In all subsequent years, switchgrass can be fertilized with 60-70 kg N/ha (50-60/lbs/acre) in late May or early June. Switchgrass will generally not respond economically to lime, phosphorus or potassium fertilization unless soil test indicate levels are very low.
7. **Mowing:** The crop is cut with a discbine in the fall after the first killing frost. The crop is cut to a 10cm stubble height and laid into a swath. It can be fall or spring baled.
8. **Raking:** When overwintered, the crop is commonly raked into a windrow to promote drying and baled as soon as drying conditions permit in the spring.
9. **Baling:** Most farmer producing switchgrass for sale will bale into large square bales for off-farm transport. Farmers growing switchgrass for on-farm use likely will find round baling to be the most economic.
10. **Storage:** Square bales can be stored for longer periods in storage sheds or under plastic tarps for shorter periods. Outdoor storage of net-wrapped round bales on a crushed gravel pad is a good option for on-farm use.