

## Orchardgrass (Forages vol. 1, 6<sup>th</sup> ed, Chapter 6 pg 125) (*Dactylis glomerata*)

### Background

- Orchardgrass is a cool-season bunch grass
- Its name derives from its ability to tolerate shade (e.g. in orchards)
- One of the most significant forage grasses in north-east USA - ideal for both hay production and grazing.
- It is probably the most important grass species in Ohio - especially for hay production on better soils.



### Quality

- Quality is dependent upon fertility and time of harvest - as the plant matures, quality decreases rapidly.
- regrowth has very high quality – especially when grazed or harvested within 3 to 4 weeks.
- Digestibility of orchardgrass fiber (NDF) is greater than for alfalfa – because of higher hemicellulose content in cell walls compared with alfalfa.

### Diseases and Insects

- Relatively free of serious pests - it can have rust and many insect species, but chemical controls are not economic.

### Advantages

- Long-lived perennial
- Good companion crop with legumes – later maturing varieties match alfalfa well, also suited to red clover.
- Easy to establish (typically sown at 12 lb/ac)
- Hardy - its large root system allows it to scavenge for nutrients and water. Tolerant of poor fertility, but extremely responsive to fertilizer - especially N
- Fast regrowth and excellent summer production.
- Orchardgrass is best adapted to well-drained soils, but tolerant to moderate drought as well as occasional water-logging

### Disadvantages

- Only moderate winter-hardiness without snow cover, moderate stockpile value
- Quality (and yield) deciles rapidly with maturity - avoid late harvests
- Can be too competitive with legumes if N is over-applied

### Identification

Ligule	membranous, prominent
Auricles	absent
Sheath	flattened
Blade	broad, V-shaped, blue-green

### Common varieties

*Old varieties:* Potomoc, Benchmark, Pennlate, Haymate

*New varieties:* Icon, Harvestar, Megabite, Athes, Shiloh, Mammoth. Varieties differ in maturity, offer improved disease resistance, and some are more grazing tolerant (eg. Tekapo).

### Establishment

- small seed: 0.9 g / 1000 seed, light seed - best lime coated if broadcast sown
- it has slow establishment and won't be the first to emerge, but has very reliable establishment
- 8-15 lb/ac if sown alone, 2-5 lb/ac in mixtures
- can be spring (April) or fall (August) planted, ideally sown with a Brillion seeder, but can be no-till planted