

Special Agronomy Project Newsletter

Broomcorn Sorghum

2022

A “how-to” guide brought to you by Nebraska Extension

The focus of the **2022 Special Agronomy Project** is the **broomcorn** plant. To participate, enroll in 4-H online under special agronomy project, tell your extension office or ag teacher.

Broomcorn is a type of **sorghum** that started as a garden crop, but soon evolved into being grown for making brooms for the home. The plant is a coarse grass that grows 6-15 ft tall. The top of the plant produces long fibers called the brush. Towards the tip of the brush is where the seeds appear. The seeds when immature are pea-green in color and when ripe are tan, reddish tan, or brown.

PLANTING & CARE...

Direct seed after last frost when soils have warmed to 55-65 degrees Fahrenheit, usually after May 1st. Being a warm season grass like sorghum, plant in an area with full sun that is well-drained. Plant at a depth of 1” and 4” apart. For good pollination and full ears, plant in blocks of 3-6 rows (36-48” apart) instead of one long row. Thin seedlings to 8” apart. This is a heavy feeder and does best in well-drained fertile soil with plenty of water.

Germination is 4-21 days. This has a maturity of 100-110 days and will grow well in most regions of the United States but prefers a long, frost-free growing season.

HARVESTING...

Broomcorn for **ornamental** uses is harvested after the seedpods are fully colored. Stalks are generally cut while still pliable (continued...)

This is a mix of many varieties in multiple colors and is a nice addition to floral arrangements.



Photo Credit: Seed Savers Exchange

What's Inside

How to grow and exhibit at the fair

Origin, History & Fun Facts about this sorghum

Complete the evaluation with a chance to win prizes!



EXTENSION

More about Broomcorn...

Origin, History & Other Fun Facts

Broomcorn is a type of sorghum that is used for making brooms. It differs from other sorghums in that it produces heads with fibrous seed branches that may be as much as 36 inches long.

Although the origin of **broomcorn** is uncertain, it is thought to have originated in central Africa. Production of the crop spread to the Mediterranean, where people used long-branched sorghum panicles for making brooms in the Dark Ages. It many have evolved because of repeated selection of seed from heads that had the longest panicle branches.

A ton of **broomcorn** makes 80 to 100 dozen brooms and high-quality broomcorn brush is pea-green in color and free from discolorations. Fibers should be straight, smooth, pliable and about 20" long. Brush that is overripe, reddened, bleached, crooked coarse or flat is considered poor quality. Stalks are of very little value for forage and the mature seed is like oat in feed value.

References & additional information:

<https://hort.purdue.edu/newcrop/afcm/broomcorn.html>
<https://www.uky.edu/ccd/sites/www.uky.edu.ccd/files/broomcorn.pdf>

HARVESTING (cont.) ...

and then sold fresh in bundles or dried. The sprays for **dried arrangements** may be hung upside down to dry or placed in an empty vase or container so they bend into an arching shape. Alternatively, stalks can be harvested by only cutting part way through the stem, then allowing tops to hang on the remaining stalk for about a week prior to complete removal.

Broomcorn is harvested for **broom-use** prior to seed maturity when the peduncles (stem that supports the flowers and seeds) turn completely from yellow to pale green. Four to five days after this stage, the brush will become brittle and no longer suitable for brooms. Harvesting at an earlier stage will result in weak fibers that are also unsuitable for broom making.

FUN FACT: Benjamin Franklin is credited with introducing broomcorn to the United States in the early 1700s.

Complete the evaluation by Nov. 1st for your name to be entered in a prize drawing.

<https://go.unl.edu/specialagronomyeval>



County/state fair Exhibits:

-Educational exhibit – Explain what was learned from the project. Present information on a poster 14x22" either vertical or horizontal arrangement or in a clear plastic cover (state fair class G750011) Be sure to include **supporting documentation**.

-Special agronomy project – video presentation – 4-H exhibitor designs a multimedia presentation related to the crop. This could include narration of the growing process, presenting facts about the crop or any other innovative multimedia practices. The presentation should be at least 2 minutes in length and no more than 5 minutes, have appropriate graphics, sound and either a video clip, animation, or voice-over and or original video clip. (state fair class G750013)

-Freshly harvested crop – Plant exhibits must be the result of the current year's project so for 2022, it would be 4 stalks (cut at the ground level & bound together). (state fair class G750031) Be sure to include (1/2 to 1 page) **supporting documentation** that explains what you learned, etc. (More details in the fair book.)



Photo Credit: University of Kentucky Extension Service

This diverse mix has varieties in many colors which includes Apache Red, Texas Black Amber, Tennessee Red, Nicaraguan Broom, Iowa Red, Hadley Kidd, Moyer Sonnen, Sattie Museum, Moyer Jensen Gold, Hungarian Red and Black, Ramirez South Chile, and Kepley.

