

INTRODUCTION

Poultry houses generate particulates, ammonia, and other odors that are expelled from the houses by the ventilation system. Particulates (dust, bits of feathers, bedding, and manure) have been linked to respiratory effects in poultry workers, and can be a source of complaints from neighbors who live near poultry farms. Ammonia emitted from poultry houses has been linked to degradation of air and water quality in the Chesapeake Bay.

Tall, stiff-stemmed warm-season grasses can be planted near poultry house ventilation fans to help trap particulates, reduce the dispersal of ammonia and other odors, and also serve as visual screens. Warm season grasses have a large number of stems and leaves that provide a dense barrier to fan emissions. Warm-season grasses are more tolerant of heat and drying winds than tree/shrub barriers, and can be planted alone, or in front of trees and shrubs to provide an initial filter for fan emissions, slowing wind speed and providing shelter for the subsequent rows of shrubs and trees.

This job sheet provides instructions for planting and maintaining the warm-season grasses in good condition so that they can serve their intended purpose. Using proper planting and management techniques, especially during the establishment years, will significantly improve plant health and survival.

SITE PREPARATION

Site conditions, including soil quality and the type and density of existing vegetation, will determine how much site preparation you will need to do before planting. Around buildings and other structures, soil may be heavily compacted or contaminated with construction debris, gravel, and other fill material that can severely hinder plant rooting and survival.

If existing grasses or weeds are tall, you should mow or brush hog the planting strips. It is recommended that the planting strips either be tilled up or treated before planting with a non-selective herbicide such as glyphosate (for example, Roundup or KleenUp), following all label directions. Then plant the warm-season grasses.



Figure 1. Recently planted warm-season grasses.

PLANTING

Warm-season grasses that are planted correctly will grow faster, and will be more likely to survive, than ones that are planted incorrectly.

Always check for utility lines (gas, water, cable, electricity) before planting. Avoid planting on top of buried utility lines, or under low-hanging overhead lines.

Planting Design

Every poultry house will differ as to the location of ventilation fans, access roads, drainage ditches, etc., so each planting design will need to accommodate these features. Where vehicle access is needed, locate the hedgerow a minimum of 50 feet from the sidewall and 80 feet from the end of the house. If the house does not have tunnel ventilation and has a south or west exposure, the minimum setback is 100 feet to provide for air movement.

Use containerized plants (1-quart containers or larger) that have well-developed root systems. Plants of this size will be able to survive better in the harsh conditions near the ventilation fans than smaller plants or seedlings. Use a minimum of two rows of grasses (if planted alone), or where space allows, use one or more rows of grasses in front of one or more rows of shrubs and/or trees. Plant the grasses 2 feet apart on center within and between rows, with a staggered planting arrangement between rows (see Figure 3,

Land owners and managers please note: If you received cost-sharing for your hedgerow, be sure to check with your funding agency/organization for specific management requirements.

page 4). It also is advisable to use more than one species or variety of grass so that a single insect or plant pathogen won't devastate the entire planting.

For optimum effectiveness trapping particulates and absorbing ammonia, warm-season grasses should be planted as close as possible to the ventilation fans, but no closer than 20 feet from the fans. At this distance, effects on fan performance were not measured but no obvious adverse effects were observed. Where vehicle access is needed, locate the hedgerow a minimum of 50 feet from the sidewall and 80 feet from the end of the house.

The length of the rows should extend an additional 20 feet from the beginning and end of the ventilation fans. For example, if the total width of multiple fans is 40 feet, then the total length of the warm-season grass rows would be 80 feet (20 + 40 + 20).

Plant Availability and Planting Dates

Containerized plants are usually available throughout the year. The preferred planting times are in the fall or spring, but the grasses can also be planted during the summer months if irrigation will be used. Planting during the dormant period (winter and early spring) is also an option if plants are available and the ground is not frozen.

In ventilation fan impact areas, planting 1-quart container stock in the spring, along with irrigation and good weed control, should produce the best results for plant survival and growth.

Storing and Planting Techniques

Containerized stock can be stored for extended periods if the plants are protected from harsh conditions. Store plants in partial to full shade and water as needed to keep moist.

Containerized warm-season grasses are usually planted by hand. Dig a planting hole, remove the pot from the root ball, and set the plant in the hole.

Adding sand, peat, compost, or other materials to a planting hole is generally not recommended unless the soil is excessively compacted or otherwise has very poor quality. The warm-season grasses recommended in this job sheet are tolerant of poor soil conditions and can usually be planted in natural soil without soil amendments.

If soil amendments are needed, the best approach is to rip or deep-till a wide planting strip and add the materials to the entire strip. If this is not feasible, then dig a wide planting hole (at least two or three times the diameter of the pot), and mix the excavated material with the soil amendments. A mixture of three parts soil to one part compost is recommended for each prepared hole.

Lime and Fertilizer

Newly planted warm-season grasses do not need to be limed and fertilized, unless soil tests show that pH and nutrients are extremely low. For most sites, it's best to allow the new plantings to become established before applying fertilizer.

Irrigation

Installation of a trickle or emitter irrigation system is highly recommended for all plantings. For the irrigation line, use ½-inch polypropylene with ½-gallon per hour emitters placed every 12 – 18 inches between rows of grasses.

Contact your local NRCS Field Service Center for a list of suppliers or irrigation companies. Be careful where you tap into your water system. Many integrators meter the water consumption for each poultry house.

Weed Control Barriers

The use of plastic landscape fabric or black polyethylene (6 mil) is highly recommended to provide an effective, long-lasting weed barrier. Black poly is generally cheaper than landscape fabric, and works well if trickle or emitter irrigation is also implemented.

Mulch can also be used around the plants, but will not provide long-term weed control unless more mulch is periodically added. If using mulch, spread a layer of well-aged bark mulch (shredded, chipped, or nuggets) 2 to 3 inches thick around new plantings. A minimum 3-foot diameter circle of mulch is recommended around each plant.

Treatment of the site with a pre- and post-emergent herbicide before planting is also helpful for controlling weed growth.

ESTABLISHING AND MAINTAINING THE PLANTING

Establishing the Planting

Planting year. After planting, keep plants watered during extremely dry periods. Warm-season grasses are more tolerant of drought and harsh conditions than cool-season grasses or most trees and shrubs, but sufficient moisture during the establishment period is important for plant survival, growth, and overall plant health. New plantings will become established more quickly when watered as needed.

The feasibility of watering will depend on the size and location of the planting, availability of a water source, watering equipment, etc. On well-drained loamy soils, new plantings usually need at least ½-inch of water per week from rainfall or irrigation in late spring and summer. On sandy soils, plants may need at least

1 inch of water per week, preferably in two separate ½-inch waterings. On heavier soils or wet sites, plants may need less water. Watering should be sufficient to moisten the soil to the depth of the roots — at least 1 foot deep. (Note: Roots will be much deeper once plants are established.)

Weed control is extremely important to the establishment and longevity of the planting. Control weeds around plants by weed wacking, hand pulling, or treating with an appropriate herbicide. Pre- and post-emergent herbicides may also be used if weeds are abundant. Herbicides can be spot-sprayed around plantings or applied to the planting strip. Do not apply herbicides when ventilation fans are active or on windy days because spray drift can damage nearby plantings.

Control noxious weeds at all times according to Maryland state law. Noxious weeds are Johnsongrass, shattercane, Canada thistle, bull thistle, plumeless thistle, and musk thistle. For more information about controlling specific weeds, contact your local office of the University of Maryland Extension or the Maryland Department of Agriculture, Weed Control Section.

Second year after planting. Continue to water plants, as needed. Control weeds by weed wacking, hand pulling, or treating with an herbicide. Always avoid damaging the plantings during weeding and herbicide application. If using mulch around plants, do not exceed a total thickness of 3 inches (new mulch, plus any remaining old mulch). Replace any dead plants until the barrier is functional.

Maintaining the Planting

By the third year, the warm-season grasses should be well-established. Continue to monitor the planting for

any problems that need to be treated. See Table 2 (next page) for a monthly summary of maintenance activities.

If weed mat is used for weed control, the openings will need to be enlarged as the grasses grow so that the mat does not constrict growth. The weed mat should be removed after 3 growing seasons. After the grasses have gone dormant, as early as October and as late as mid-April, cut or mow stalks to about 6 inches from ground level. Some farmers have used the cut stalks of the grasses for duck blinds, and there is great potential for use of the stalks for biofuels.



Figure 2. Late summer, second year after planting. These warm-season grasses are at least 6 feet tall.

Table 1. Recommended warm-season grasses for planting near poultry house ventilation fans.

Common Name	Scientific Name	Cultivar	Mature Size (width x height)	Remarks
Coastal Panicgrass	<i>Panicum amarum</i> var. <i>amarulum</i>	'Atlantic' or 'Dewey Blue'	3' x 6'	Quickest to establish, but not as stiff-stemmed as others on this list. 'Dewey Blue' has especially attractive bluish leaves.
Switchgrass	<i>Panicum virgatum</i>	'Kanlow'	5' x 6'	Vigorous lowland switchgrass, typically used for biofuel production. Especially good for moist soils.
Switchgrass	<i>Panicum virgatum</i>	'Northwind'	2' x 6'	Does not spread as much as other cultivars. Useful for planting closest to the ventilation fans if space is limited.
Switchgrass	<i>Panicum virgatum</i>	'Thundercloud'	4' x 8'	Tallest cultivar on this list. If using multiple rows, can be planted downwind of shorter plants. Also can be placed at greater distances from ventilation fans due to taller height.

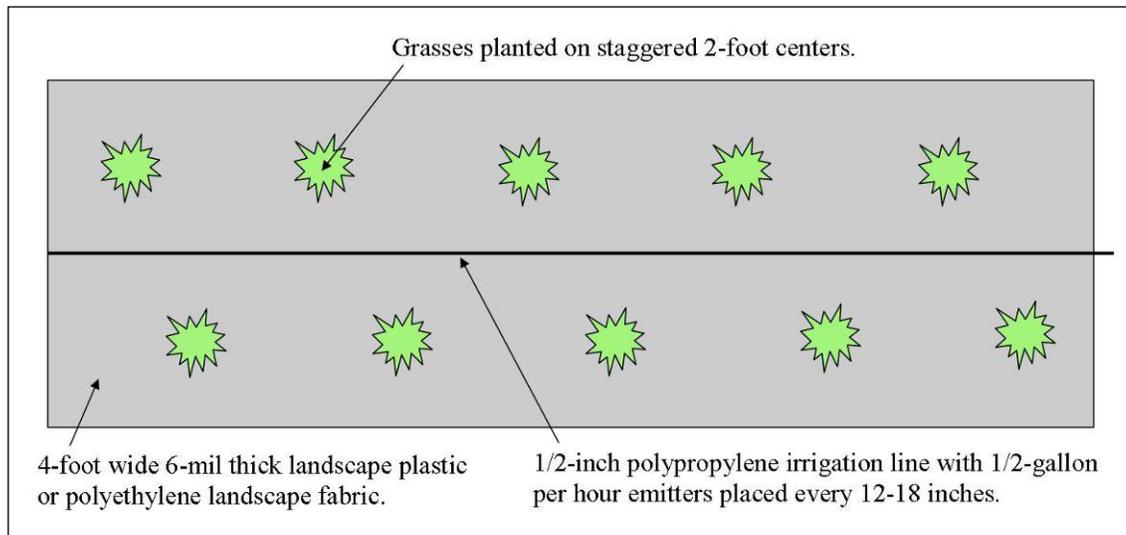


Figure 3. Warm-season grass planting layout.

Table 2. Warm-season grass planting, maintenance, monitoring and evaluation calendar.

Activity	Recommended Time of Year											
	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
<i>Planting</i>												
Containerized Plants												
<i>Maintenance</i>												
Mulching												
Watering												
Monitoring ^{1/}												
Evaluation ^{2/}												

Notes:

1/ **Monitoring** – Pay special attention during these months to mulching and watering needs, weeds to be cut/sprayed, or disease or insect infestations that may be controllable. Monitor for a minimum of the first two growing seasons. Frequent monitoring will help you to identify problems early, before damage becomes extensive.

2/ **Evaluation** – Assess survival of the plants in late summer, and determine the need for replanting.

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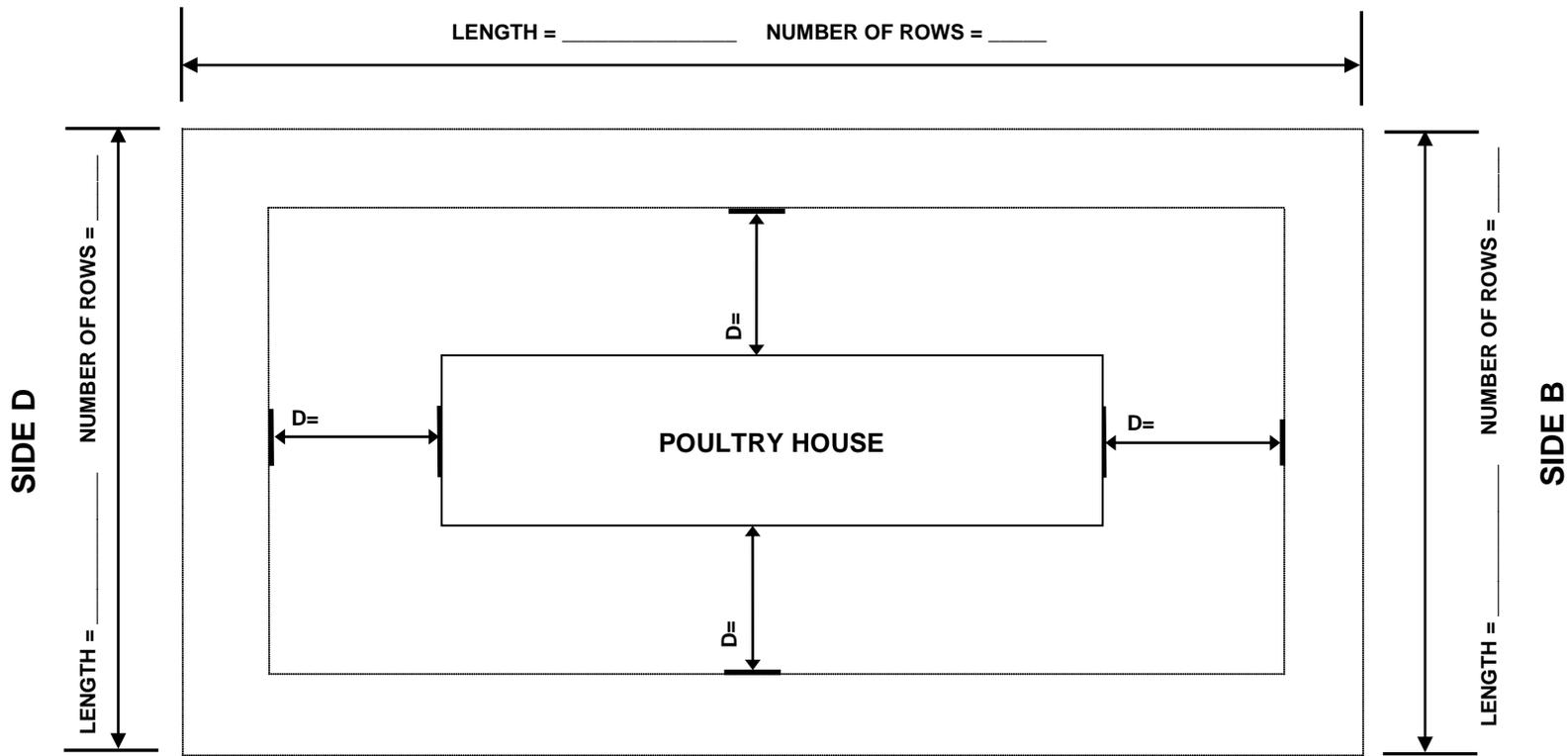
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**HEDGEROW PLANTING for POULTRY HOUSES
PLAN VIEW**

Landowner Name:	Poultry House No.:	Assisted By:	Date:
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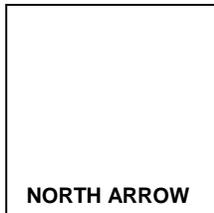
SIDE A

LENGTH = _____ NUMBER OF ROWS = _____



SIDE C

LENGTH = _____ NUMBER OF ROWS = _____



SEE ATTACHED SHEETS FOR ADDITIONAL PLANTING REQUIREMENTS

Call before you dig!
811 in DE & MD.
MISS UTILITY
GIVE TWO BUSINESS
DAYS NOTICE