

☰ Topic Page: [sorghum](#)

Definition: **sorghum** from *Environmental History and Global Change: A Dictionary of Environmental History*

A genus of grasses native to tropical and subtropical regions of which one, *S. Bicolour* is the world's 5th most important cereal crop. It is thought to have originated in N **Africa** and was recorded in ancient Egypt and Assyria. It spread to **China** by the C13AD and to the Americas in the early C17. It is drought tolerant and well suited to semi-arid areas. Today the **USA** is the largest producer followed by Nigeria, **India**, **Mexico** and Sudan.



Image from: [The most widely cultivated grain in Africa,... in Philip's Encyclopedia](#)

Summary Article: **sorghum**
from *The Columbia Encyclopedia*

tall, coarse annual (*Sorghum vulgare*) of the family Poaceae (grass family), somewhat similar in appearance to corn (but having the grain in a panicle rather than an ear) and used for much the same purposes. Probably indigenous to Africa, it is one of the longest-cultivated plants of warm regions there and also in Asia—especially in India and China. Because of its extreme drought resistance (because of the unusually extensive branching root system) and its ability to withstand hotter climates than corn, sorghum has been introduced to the United States and other regions.

The innumerable varieties are generally classified as the sweet sorghums or sorgos, yielding sorghum syrups and molasses from the cane juice; the broomcorns, yielding a fiber from the inflorescence that is used for making brooms; the grass sorghums (e.g., Sudan grass), used for pasture and hay; and the grain sorghums, e.g., durra, feterita, kaffir or kaffir corn, kaoliang, milo or milo maize, and shallu. The pulverized grain is used for stock and poultry feeds and, in the Old World, for food. Sorghums also provide cover crops and green manures, grain substitutes for many industrial processes that employ corn, and fuel and weaving material from the stems.

In the United States, sorghum is grown throughout the Great Plains area and in Arizona and California; about half the crop is used for forage and silage and half for feed grains. Only a small amount is grown for syrup, most of which is consumed locally. Johnson grass (*S. halapense*), a perennial native to the Mediterranean that is similar to Sudan grass, is naturalized in the United States, especially in the Southwest. It is a noxious weed in cultivated fields but is also used as a forage crop.

Sorghum is classified in the division Magnoliophyta, class Liliopsida, order Cyperales, family Poaceae.

See bulletins of the U.S. Dept. of Agriculture.

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sorghum. (2018). In P. Lagasse, & Columbia University, *The Columbia encyclopedia* (8th ed.). New York, NY: Columbia University Press. Retrieved from <https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/sorghum>



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