

Hairy Vetch

Sand vetch, Winter vetch

Vicia villosa

Fabaceae, Leguminosae family

ECHO PLANT INFORMATION SHEET

ORIGIN - The vetches most often planted for commercial use are native to Europe or western Asia and are now found in most temperate zones.

USES - Hairy vetch far outperforms all other vetches. It is seeded in the fall, acts as a cover crop through a moderate winter, and is harvested or grazed the following summer. The vetch crop will fix nitrogen in the soil, (2-3 lb./acre/day under spring sun), prevent erosion, withstand trampling by foraging livestock, shade out weed growth, require no fertilizer and can be made into hay or silage with a high protein content.

CULTIVATION - Vetch can be planted without disrupting the soil by plowing. Stubble or other crop residue left from a corn or maize harvest may provide sufficient cover, along with snow, to reduce the possibility of winterkill. A wide range of soil types and acidity are tolerated but the soil should be well drained. Through the cold period, it is drought tolerant as there is not much vegetative growth occurring. If this is the first vetch crop in this location, the seed should be inoculated with compatible *Rhizobium* bacteria to enable fixing nitrogen. It can be seeded in combination with other winter grains that will support the hairy vetch vines that can reach 12' long. Record yields of vegetables have been produced on formerly depleted soil by using chopped residues of the previous crop, and chopped vetch as the planting material into which new vegetable seedlings or seeds are placed.

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HARVESTING & SEED PRODUCTION - In the summer, the vetch can be cut at full bloom close to the ground and left on the field as mulch or fed to cattle. Some moderate grazing will delay flowering and produce a better yield of seed. Harvesting the seed is difficult because the seedpods mature at different times and shatter easily. The lost seed can be raked in to begin a new crop. Harvested seed of hairy vetch will remain viable for five years.

DISEASES AND PESTS - Hairy vetch hosts many small insects and organisms that are beneficial to soil but is attacked by others that become pests. Root rot and downy mildew are caused by different fungi. Root-knot nematode is most troublesome in warm soil so the vetch should have some fall growth on it by the time the soil warms the following summer. It is best to rotate this crop with others and use resistant varieties.

COOKING AND NUTRITION - Vetch is not consumed by humans, only livestock.

ECHO 17391 Durrance Rd., N. Ft. Myers, FL 33917-2239 USA
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