



## TAM-AAMM

*Texas A&M—AgriLife Agronomic Monday Memo*

### **Young Grain Sorghum & Corn Look the Same—How to tell the difference.**

*Small details in the plants and the field setting will help distinguish these two crops.*



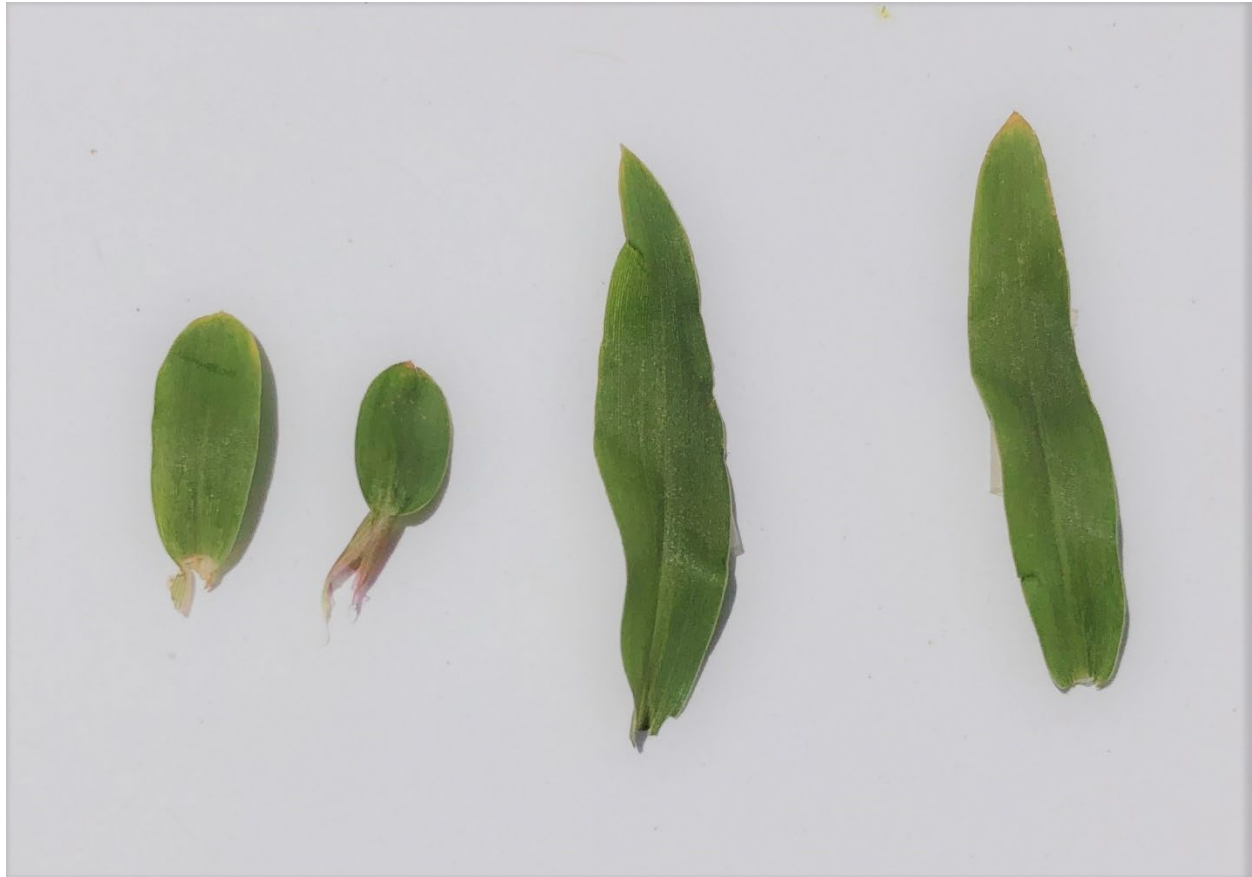
**Fig. 1.** The first leaf symptoms that distinguish grain sorghum or other sorghum forage from corn. The first leaf in sorghum (any type; left) is rounded including the tip vs. the larger first leaf in corn, which is ovoid in shape. (Calvin Trostle.)

#### **How to Distinguish Young Sorghum and Corn**

Many an agronomist, farmer, or other agricultural worker has often wondered how to distinguish young grain sorghum and corn plants in the field. Many times have I driven down a road wondering if the field I see is corn or grain sorghum.

[Here are some tips](#) on how to distinguish the two, even if plants are brought to you and you do not see the field.

- The first leaf on any sorghum family crop (grain sorghum, sorghum/sudan, etc.) is rounded and has a more rounded tip (Fig. 1). First corn leaves are generally two to four times larger. Though the first leaf in corn may have a curved tip, it is less rounded. The overall corn Leaf 1 shape is ovoid. For sorghum that is a month old or more, the first leaf dries up and may not be readily seen. But I can still usually find it (still attached to the stalk) and make out the rounded shape of this smaller leaf. The second leaf of grain sorghum (Fig. 2; and also corn) will have a more distinct pointed tip (Fig. 2).



**Sorghum Leaf 1**

**Sorghum Leaf 2**

**Fig. 2.** The first sorghum leaf is more rounded in both shape and the leaf tip in contrast to the pointed tip of leaf 2 (right). (Calvin Trostle.)

- Leaf edges. Sorghum has a sawtooth or serrated leaf edge that is 'scratchy' if you run your finger along the edge. If not visible with the natural eye, a simple magnifying glass will reveal the edges. This is true of each leaf on a sorghum plant vs. corn plant, regardless of the age of the leaf or when it was developed. Corn leaf edges are mostly smooth.

- Field setting. Grain sorghum in the typical row spacing of your area will always have a higher plant density per unit area than corn. This is double or even triple the number of corn plants. Sorghum seedlings could be as close as three inches whereas most Texas corn is more likely to have about six inches between plants in many Texas fields.
- Most grain sorghum plants will tiller from the base of the plant—even by about Leaf Stage 8 (eight full leaves with a collar on the most recent fully expanded leaf; the plant could be 12 to 15 inches tall).

***Finally, if you are still unsure—grain sorghum or corn?***

Dig up the root to look for the original seed. For a couple months after planting, you will usually find the seed still attached to the root system. Corn seed is several times larger than grain sorghum. Fungus and decomposition will gradually make seed unrecognizable.

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**From TAM—AAMM one year ago:** “Keeping Current with AgriLife Extension Test Lab Submittal Forms” (June 12, 2023).

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