

A Six-Pack Of Tips For Healthy Cotton In 2013



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The day cotton farmers' plant is the most important day for that crop the entire year. If the weather is warm 10 to 14 days after planting, the plants will emerge quickly, the seedlings will develop a robust root system, and the plants will grow and yield well that year. If the weather is cold and wet for 10 to 14 days after planting, diseases will attack the seedlings and kill many so the stand will be thin and uneven, the roots of surviving plants will be stunted, and the plants will grow and yield poorly that year. Farmers can help protect their young cotton crop against seedling diseases that may develop during cool wet weather by following the six steps listed below. I call these six steps a six-pack of tips for a healthy cotton crop.

1. Plant only when the soil temperature 4 inches deep has warmed up to about 65°F by 8:00 a.m. and plant only when at least 7 days of warm and dry weather are predicted.

2. Plant only high-quality seed. Seed quality can be partially judged by the warm and cold germination test results. The seed should germinate better than 80 percent in the warm test and better than 50 percent in the cold test. The warm test results are printed on the seed bag,

but the results of the cold test are not. Ask your seed dealer about the cold germination test results.

3. Plant in fertile soil. Ensure that soil pH, phosphate and potash levels are proper for new plant growth.

4. Plant on high beds. Seedling diseases are worse when the soil is cold and wet. To minimize seedling diseases, plant on raised beds to maximize drainage and soil temperature. The top of a raised bed is generally warmer than flat soil. Make sure field drainage is adequate to quickly eliminate excess water. Internal soil drainage will be improved if hardpans are broken with a ripper.

5. Have the seed treated with extra fungicides when cotton is planted early in the season, in poorly drained fields, or in clay soils, and certainly in fields where seedling diseases have been a problem in previous years.

6. When planting no-till, equip your planter to move trash away from the row, so the sun can warm the soil around the seed faster.

Following these suggested procedures will give cotton farmers a better chance of producing high yield and profit during 2013. More information is available at your county extension office or on the University of Missouri Delta Center Web Page (www.aes.missouri.edu/delta).

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