



Species  
Cool-Season Grass  
**Reed Canary**  
Illinois

NOTE: *Reed Canary grass is NOT recommended in Illinois due to aggressive nature.*

**General Information**

Reed canary grass is a tall-growing, cool-season perennial with a rhizomatous root system. Tolerant of flood and drought, and is used for pasture, hay and erosion control. Reed Canary grass is one of the first grasses to begin spring growth.



Animals grazing reed canary grass during spring and summer perform similar to those grazing orchard grass, timothy or brome, and they perform better than animals grazing fescue. However, Reed Canary grass is not as well suited for fall and winter grazing as tall fescue, due to being one of the first cool-season grasses to stop growing and lose of green color. Reed Canary makes excellent hay for horses, who have shown preference over good quality timothy hay.

Reed Canary grass was first used in the southern corn belt to control erosion in ditches, waterways and gullies, and excellent for that purpose wherever the grass is adaptable. Several improved varieties of reed canary grass are available. Breed and Rise are high alkaloid varieties while Palaton and Venture have low alkaloid levels.

**Adaptability**

No other forage plant is more adapted to wet, marshy areas as Reed Canary grass, and has withstood flooding for as long as 49 days without permanent injury. Reed Canary grass also has been found to be one of the most drought tolerant of the cool-season grasses.

Reed Canary grass has been widely used in the northern region of the central United States for many years, is adapted to all of Illinois. Some of the most vigorous, productive stands are in the extreme southeast part of the state.

CAUTION: *Reed Canary grass is very aggressive and has been removed from NRCS standards.*

**Establishment**

Reed Canary grass may be established in the same manner as other cool-season grasses. Purchase only pure live seed to be seeded during August or early in the spring. Check with Natural Resources Conservation Service or University Extension for current recommended seeding rates and dates.

**Management**

Reed Canary grass may be used as sod in areas where seeding is difficult. Small pieces of sod are embedded at one to two-foot intervals across gullies in early spring, or in the fall when the soil is wet. Shoots will emerge through six to eight inches of sediment.

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## Management

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Reed Canary grass should not be allowed to get higher than 14 inches for best results in a pasture system. In pure stands, reed canary grass will respond to extremely high rates of nitrogen, and will make more summer growth under these conditions than any other cool-season grass in Illinois.

Reed Canary grass can be made into hay, but should not be allowed to become coarse and stemmy. Because of early spring growth, graze the grass first to delay the haying period. If cut for hay without grazing the first growth, mow grass when heads first begin to appear.

Legumes can be maintained with Reed Canary grass despite the ability to form thick sod. Upright growth characteristic allows substantial light to reach the legumes. In wet, low areas, ladino or alsike clover make good companion legumes. On upland sods, ladino, red clover, birdsfoot trefoil and alfalfa grow well with Reed Canary grass.

Seed production usually is a problem with Reed Canary grass because of shattering. The seed head matures downward from the top of the panicle, and the first mature seed shatters before the remainder of the seed in the head is ready to harvest. Only two or three days separate the ripening of the first seed and the start of extreme shattering. For seed production, nitrogen should be applied from December through January. Seed yields will be increased by applying 100 to 125 pounds of nitrogen per acre.

## Where To Get Help

For more information about reed canary grass, contact your local office of the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, listed in the telephone directory under "U.S. Government," or the University of Illinois Extension.



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