

Growing Reed Canarygrass for Forage

Area of Adaption

Reed canarygrass (*Phalaris arundinacea*) is adapted to the northern part of the United States and to southern Canada. Large acreages are found in the Pacific Northwest and in the north-central states. Reed canarygrass is tolerant of flooding and poorly drained, wet areas. It is also fairly tolerant of drought but may winterkill in cold, dry climates.

Primary Use

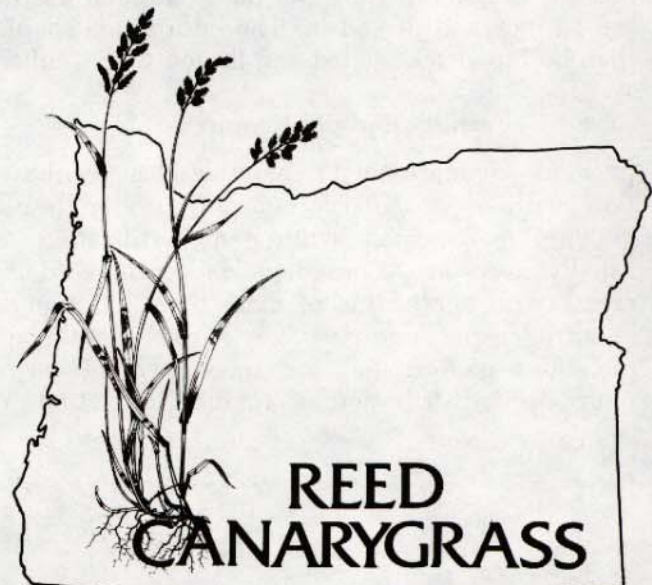
Reed canarygrass can be used for pasture, hay, or silage. It is often used in soil conservation programs and can be used for gully control, on grassed waterways, and on edges of farm ponds. However, it is seldom used in Oregon on better drained land or with irrigation. Species that are more palatable and easier to manage can be used in these situations.

When reed canarygrass is used alone for pasture, satisfactory performance may be obtained with both sheep and cattle. Reed canarygrass is not recommended for use by dairy cows. The addition of white clover in new plantings will improve sheep and cattle performance, but the grass often forces out the clover. High yields (7-8 tons/acre) of hay have been reported in Oregon when reed canarygrass is fertilized adequately. Preser-

vation of reed canarygrass as silage offers the advantage of saving the feed value when conditions are not suitable for making hay.

Varieties

"Common" reed canarygrass is available from a number of suppliers. The cultivar Superior was developed in Oregon for use in upland areas.



Use	Precipitation	Reed canarygrass seeding rate	Companion species	Companion species seeding rate
	<i>Inches</i>	<i>Lbs/A</i>		<i>Lbs/A</i>
Pasture	> 40 or wetlands	7-8	-----	-----
		5-6	White clover	2-3
		5-6	Birdsfoot trefoil	4-6
		5-6	Big trefoil	2
Hay or silage	> 40 or wetlands	7-8	-----	-----

Several other improved varieties have been developed, including Castor, Ioreed, and Vantage, but no data are available on their performance in Oregon.

Establishment

Much of the available seed has low germination percentages, so reed canarygrass is somewhat difficult to establish. Either spring or late summer seeding is satisfactory if sufficient moisture is available. In areas that are too wet for seeding at these times, a very late seeding is possible for spring germination. Seed should be planted $\frac{1}{4}$ inch deep in areas where a seedbed can be prepared. Broadcast seeding is also acceptable in areas that are too wet to work. For conservation planting in waterways or for bank erosion control, small pieces of sod can be placed 1 to 2 inches below the soil surface, or they can be distributed on the soil surface and disked in. The entire area should then be broadcast-seeded and firmed with a roller.

Fertility and pH Requirements

Since legumes can be maintained in combination with reed canarygrass only under heavy grazing management, nitrogen fertilization is usually necessary. Forage yields continue to increase with application of more than 200 pounds of nitrogen per acre per year. However, split applications of nitrogen are recommended for a more even distribution of forage production. If

reed canarygrass is planted in combination with a legume, nitrogen fertilization will not be required. Early spring application of 30 to 35 pounds of nitrogen will, however, provide for earlier and more vigorous spring growth. Specific recommendations for phosphorus and sulfur, based upon soil test data, are provided in OSU Fertilizer Guides 1 and 58. Although not tolerant of saline soils, reed canarygrass will tolerate pH ranges of 5 to 8.

Management

Rotational grazing, which utilizes heavy grazing pressure for short periods, results in the best utilization of reed canarygrass pastures. Light, continuous grazing results in selective grazing in which mature growth accumulates. If a stiff, short stubble builds up, a single close clipping to a height of 2 to 3 inches will improve utilization.

Highest hay and silage quality will be obtained if the crop is harvested before heading. In this way, two or three excellent quality crops can be obtained. In areas that are too wet to harvest early enough to obtain good quality hay, the mature grass can be harvested for bedding material.

By David B. Hannaway, Extension agronomist, and William S. McGuire, professor of agronomy, Oregon State University.