

Forage Factsheet – Reed Canary Grass

Species Name: Reed Canary Grass – *Phalaris arundinacea*

Origin: Native to wetlands of North America and northern Europe. Improved cultivars originate from Swedish parental lines.

Longevity: Long-lived.

Uses: Hay, pasture, stockpiling, reclamation.

Optimal time of use: Reed canary grass should be used at the initiation of heading to maximize palatability, digestibility, yield and protein. Leave at least 2.5 inches (63 mm) of stubble after grazing to hasten regrowth. Reed canary grass has adequate feed value when stockpiled to maintain a pregnant cow until the end of the third trimester.

Recovery after use: Reed canary grass regrows quickly after use. Allow reed canary grass to regrow approximately 12 inches (30 cm) before regrazing.

Yield: Reed canary grass yields approximately 1470 lbs/acre (1670 kg/ha) in the Brown soil zone, 4410 lbs/acre (5011 kg/ha) in the Dark Brown soil zone, and 4460 lbs/acre (5068 kg/ha) in the Black and Grey soil zones.

Palatability/Nutritional Value: Reed canary grass has an average digestibility of 55-65% and crude protein levels ranging from 12-15% just prior to haying. Late harvesting lowers digestibility to approximately 40% and crude protein to 6%. Reed canary grass must be kept in a vegetative stage during grazing to remain palatable. Reed canary grass can accumulate alkaloids, which can lower feed intake, and cause diarrhea, watery eyes, fast breathing, and lack of thrift in livestock. All reed canary grass varieties registered in Canada have low alkaloid levels. Use certified seed of a registered variety to avoid problems with alkaloids.

Competitiveness: Reed canary grass is a strong sod former and is very competitive. With correct harvesting and fertility management, reed canary grass will fill in bare patches and out-compete weeds in the stand.

Winter Hardiness: Reed canary grass has good winter hardiness. Winter hardiness can be further improved by allowing four weeks rest after use before the first killing frost, minimizing traffic on young stands and maintaining snow cover.

Drought Tolerance: Reed canary grass has moderate drought tolerance.

Erosion Control: Reed canary grass is excellent at controlling erosion. It forms a thick sod which holds soil in place.

Ease of Establishment: Reed canary grass seedlings do not tolerate flooding. Seed reed canary grass so that germination occurs later in the season when soil moisture levels are lower. Stands that are initially thin will fill in within one to two years.

Suggested Mixtures: NA

Salinity Tolerance: Reed canary grass has poor salinity tolerance.

Flooding Tolerance: Reed canary grass withstands five to eight weeks of spring flooding and grows well in waterlogged soils.

Soil Texture: Reed canary grass is suited to loamy, clay, and peat soils. Suitable sites include flood plains, creeks, and slough and wetland margins or riparian areas.

Acidity Tolerance: Reed canary grass tolerates soil pH as low as 5.0 to 5.5.

Management Considerations: Spiking, coultering or knifing old reed canary grass stands will cut rhizomes or roots and stimulate new growth. Reed canary grass responds well to nitrogen fertilization.

Source: Saskatchewan Forage Council, 2007.
Dryland Forage Species Adaptation CD.