

Calamagrostis arundinacea: Reed Grass¹

Keighly Graves, Tom Wichman, Wendy Wilber, Claire Lewis, Gail Hansen, and Ryan Klein²

<https://ffl.ifas.ufl.edu/>

This Florida-Friendly Landscaping™ publication is part of a series originally written by Edward F. Gilman. Visit <https://ffl.ifas.ufl.edu/> to learn more about creating and maintaining attractive landscapes that protect Florida's water resources and environment.

Introduction

Reed grass (*Calamagrostis arundinacea*) is a fine-textured ornamental grass with an upright growth habit that attains a height and spread of 2 to 4 feet (Figure 1). The medium green leaves of this plant are lanceolate in shape and have a brown fall coloration that persists into winter (Figure 2). The inflorescence of this plant is a compact, spike-like panicle that is 4 to 8 inches long and appears atop stems that may be up to 4 feet tall (Figure 3). These inflorescences are loosely branched and have a pinkish white or reddish cast. They appear in the summer and are followed by attractive seed heads that are used in flower arrangements. Following the flowers, a seedhead appears (caryopsis) bearing dried elongated seeds (Figure 4). This plant spreads by rhizomes, which allows it to slowly increase in diameter. Reed grass is suitable for cut or dried flower arrangements, habitat restoration and coastal landscaping, works well as a windbreaker, may be a specimen or used in mass plantings, and works well in containers or above-ground planters.



Figure 1. Full form—*Calamagrostis arundinacea*: reed grass.

Credit: © Franck Le Driant, some rights reserved (CC BY-NC) via iNaturalist



Figure 2. Leaf—*Calamagrostis arundinacea*: reed grass.

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Figure 3. Flower—*Calamagrostis arundinacea*: reed grass.

Credit: © Franck Le Driant, some rights reserved (CC BY-NC) via iNaturalist



Figure 4. Fruit—*Calamagrostis arundinacea*: reed grass.

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General Information

Scientific name: *Calamagrostis arundinacea*

Pronunciation: kal-uh-muh-GRAW-stiss uh-run-din-NAYsee-uh

Common name(s): reed grass; diamond grass; foxtail grass

Family: *Poaceae*

Plant type: herbaceous; ornamental grass

USDA hardiness zones: 4A through 9B (Figures 5 and 6)

USDA Hardiness Zones 4A-9B

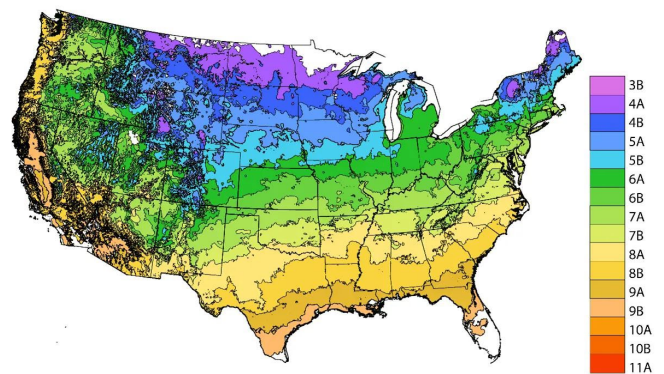


Figure 5. Shaded area represents potential planting zone—USDA Hardiness Zones 4A-9B.

Credit: This map is based on the 2023 USDA Plant Hardiness Zone Map. Visit

<https://planthardiness.ars.usda.gov/> for specific zone information.

USDA Hardiness Zone 7B-9B

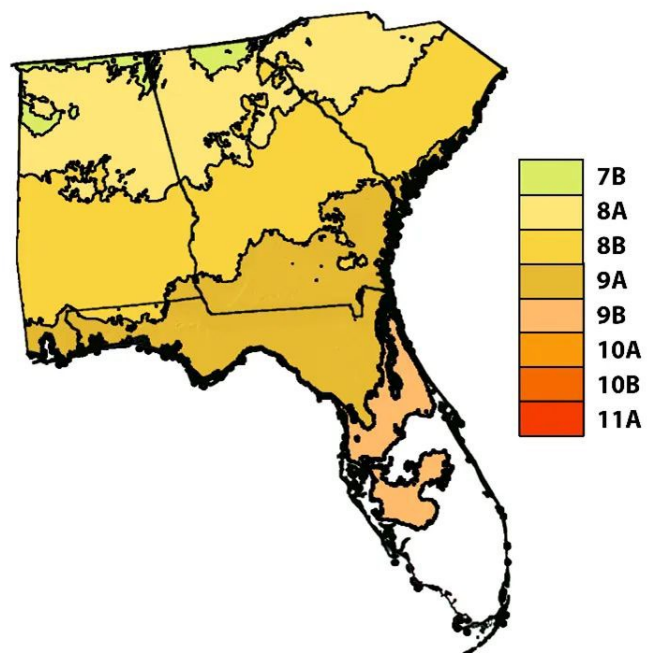


Figure 6. Shaded area represents potential planting zone in the SE Region—USDA Hardiness Zones 7B-9B.

Credit: This map is based on the 2023 USDA Plant Hardiness Zone Map. Visit

<https://planthardiness.ars.usda.gov/> for specific zone information.

Planting month for zone 7: Mar.–Oct.

Planting month for zone 8: Feb.–Oct.

Planting month for zone 9: year-round

Origin: not native to North America

Invasive potential: not known to be invasive

Uses: specimen; mass planting; container or above-ground planter; cut flowers; border; accent; coastal landscaping

Availability: somewhat available, may have to go out of the region to find the plant

Description

Height: 2 to 4 feet

Spread: 2 to 4 feet

Plant habit: upright; arching; mounding

Plant density: dense

Growth rate: fast

Texture: fine

Foliage

Leaf arrangement: most emerge from the soil, usually without a stem

Leaf type: simple

Leaf margin: entire

Leaf shape: lanceolate

Leaf venation: parallel

Leaf type and persistence: deciduous

Leaf blade length: more than 36 inches

Leaf color: green

Fall color: brown or tan

Fall characteristic: showy

Flower

Flower color: pink

Flower characteristic: summer flowering

Fruit

Fruit shape: elongated

Fruit length: less than 1/2 inch

Fruit cover: dry or hard

Fruit color: tan

Fruit characteristic: showy

Trunk and Branches

Trunk/bark/branches: typically multi-trunked or clumping stems

Current year stem/twig color: not applicable

Current year stem/twig thickness: not applicable

Culture

Light requirement: plant grows in full sun; plant grows in partial shade

Soil tolerances: extended flooding; acidic; clay; sand; loam

Drought tolerance: moderate

Soil salt tolerances: good

Plant spacing: 36 to 60 inches

Other

Roots: not applicable

Winter interest: plant has winter interest due to unusual form and nice persistent fruits

Invasive potential: not known to be invasive

Pest resistance: no serious pests are normally seen on the plant

Use and Management

Reed grass can grow in an area of the landscape receiving full sun or partial shade. Reed grass prefers wet brackish soil but will thrive in heavy clay soils with less moisture. The size of this plant depends on the moisture supply; it will grow larger with increased moisture levels.

Reed grass is excellent for naturalized areas in freshwater bogs and swamps, around lakes and ponds, and along streams. It is suited for planting near water gardens due to its tolerance of wet soil. It is a good specimen plant but also looks great planted en masse. This grass is tolerant of salt spray making it wonderful for coastal landscapes. In seashore plantings it can provide a tall screen or windbreak and is useful for erosion control. This is a hardy plant as it tolerates a variety of soil conditions including drought and wet soils, is salt tolerant, and is herbivore

resistant. This plant does spread quickly via rhizomes and may require management to keep it within bounds.

The propagation of reed grass is accomplished by plant divisions.

Design Considerations

Reed grass offers a graceful vertical accent, distinguished by a softer, fountain-like habit that introduces gentle motion into the garden. Its fine, airy texture and delicate plumes create a hazy, see-through effect perfect for softening views or creating a light screen. As a cool-season grass, it greens up early, producing bronze-purple plumes in summer that mature to a buff-tan, holding their color and shape for essential winter structure. Use it massed for a meadow-like drift, repeated for rhythm along a border, or as a vertical "exclamation point," especially where it can be backlit by the sun.

For companion plantings, contrast its fine, vertical form with sturdy, mounded plants like purple coneflower (*Echinacea purpurea*), black-eyed Susan (*Rudbeckia hirta*), or firebush (*Hamelia patens*). Alternatively, echo its upright habit with the spires of salvia (*Salvia* spp.) or blazing star (*Liatris* spp.) to create rhythm, or interplant it with airy perennials like verbena (*Verbena* spp.) to achieve a soft, meadow-like feel.

Pests and Diseases

No pests or diseases of major concern.

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² Keighly Graves, horticultural science specialist, Florida-Friendly Landscaping™ Program; Tom Wichman, Extension program manager, Florida-Friendly Landscaping™ Program, UF/IFAS Center for Land Use Efficiency; Wendy Wilber, state program coordinator and Extension agent IV, UF/IFAS Extension Master Gardener Volunteer Program; Claire Lewis, state specialized agent II and director Florida-Friendly Landscaping™ Program, UF/IFAS Center for Land Use Efficiency; Gail Hansen, professor, sustainable landscape design, Department of Horticultural Sciences; Ryan Klein, assistant professor, arboriculture, School of Forest, Fisheries, and Geomatics Sciences; UF/IFAS Extension, Gainesville, FL 32611.

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