

# *Pennisetum setaceum* 'Rubrum' Purple Fountain Grass<sup>1</sup>

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## Introduction

Red fountain grass is an ornamental grass that is used in the landscape for its reddish foliage and showy flowers (Fig. 1). The leaves of this 3- to 4-foot-tall plant are narrow, curving, linear blades with a beautiful red cast. The purple-pink or copper colored inflorescence of red fountain grass sits atop a hollow, 3-foot-long, nodding flower stalk. The feathery inflorescence is 12 inches long and occurs from early summer to frost. The fruits of this grass are small seeds that volunteer to form small plantlets nearby; this plant is considered mildly invasive.

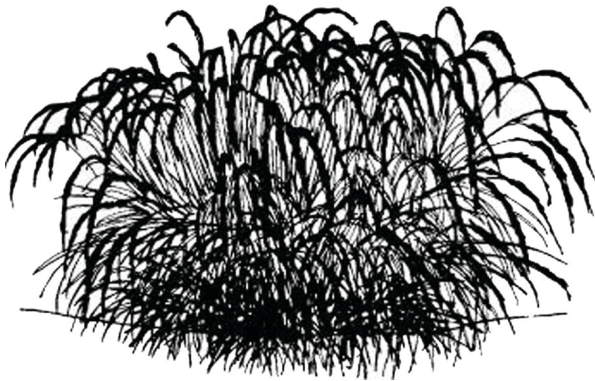


Figure 1. Red fountain grass

## General Information

**Scientific name:** *Pennisetum setaceum* 'Rubrum'  
**Pronunciation:** pen-niss-SEE-tum set-TAY-see-um variety ROO-brum  
**Common name(s):** red fountain grass, purple fountain grass

**Family:** *Gramineae*

**Plant type:** ornamental grass; herbaceous

**USDA hardiness zones:** 9 through 11 (Fig. 2)

**Planting month for zone 9:** year round

**Planting month for zone 10 and 11:** year round

**Origin:** not native to North America

**Uses:** not recommended for planting

**Availability:** generally available in many areas within its hardiness range



Figure 2. Shaded area represents potential planting range.

## Description

**Height:** 4 to 6 feet

**Spread:** 2 to 4 feet

**Plant habit:** upright

**Plant density:** moderate

**Growth rate:** fast

**Texture:** fine

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## Foliage

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

**Leaf type:** simple

**Leaf margin:** entire

**Leaf shape:** linear

**Leaf venation:** parallel

**Leaf type and persistence:** deciduous

**Leaf blade length:** 18 to 36 inches

**Leaf color:** purple or red

**Fall color:** red

**Fall characteristic:** showy

## Flower

**Flower color:** purple-pink; copper

**Flower characteristic:** summer flowering; fall flowering

## Fruit

**Fruit shape:** unknown

**Fruit length:** unknown

**Fruit cover:** unknown

**Fruit color:** unknown

**Fruit characteristic:** inconspicuous and not 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

**Soil tolerances:** acidic; slightly alkaline; sand; loam; clay

**Drought tolerance:** moderate

**Soil salt tolerances:** unknown

**Plant spacing:** 36 to 60 inches

## Other

**Roots:** not applicable

**Winter interest:** no special winter interest

**Outstanding plant:** plant has outstanding ornamental features and could be planted more

**Invasive potential:** potentially invasive

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

## Use and Management

Red fountain grass has been considered a valuable accent or specimen plant used around a fountain for the cooling silhouette it presents. This plant is also lovely when planted in mass, and it makes a nice accent in a border. Flowers can be cut for fresh arrangements but fall apart as they dry, making them unsuited for dry arrangements. However, the plant will re-seed itself into surrounding landscapes. This could present a problem under certain circumstances.

*Pennisetum setaceum* 'Rubrum' should be planted on a well-drained site that is exposed to full sun. Plants grow poorly in the partial shade unless the soil has been cleared of roots surrounding trees and shrubs. This grass is grown as a perennial in most of Florida (zones 9 through 10) but is an annual in cooler climates. It may grow back from the roots in the spring in north Florida. It is moderately drought tolerant.

'Rubrum Dwarf' grows 2 1/2 to 3 feet tall.

## Pests and Diseases

No pests or diseases are of major concern.