

Pennisetum setaceum 'Rubrum' Purple Fountain Grass¹

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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. 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. Full Form—*Pennisetum setaceum* 'Rubrum': Purple fountain grass.

Credits: Edward F. Gilman, UF/IFAS

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: *Poaceae*

Plant type: ornamental grass; herbaceous

USDA hardiness zones: 9 through 11 (Figure 2)



Figure 2. Shaded area represents potential planting range.

Planting month for zone 9: year-round

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Planting month for zone 10 and 11: year-round

Origin: not native to North America

Invasive potential: potentially invasive

Uses: not recommended for planting

Availability: generally available in many areas within its hardiness range

Description

Height: 4 to 6 feet

Spread: 2 to 4 feet

Plant habit: upright

Plant density: moderate

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: 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

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 2.5 to 3 feet tall.

Pests and Diseases

No pests or diseases are of major concern.