

SWITCHGRASS *Panicum virgatum* L.

Plant Symbol = PAVI2

Contributed by: USDA NRCS Plant Materials Program



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From the Southern Wetland Flora (1991)
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Uses

Livestock: Switchgrass is noted for its heavy growth during late spring and early summer. It provides good warm-season pasture and high quality hay for livestock.

Erosion Control: Switchgrass is perhaps our most valuable native grass on a wide range of sites. It is a valuable soil stabilization plant on strip-mine spoils, sand dunes, dikes, and other critical areas. It is also suitable for low windbreak plantings in truck crop fields.

Wildlife: Switchgrass provides excellent nesting and fall and winter cover for pheasants, quail, and rabbits. It holds up well in heavy snow (particularly 'Shelter' and 'Kanlow' cultivars) and is useful on shooting preserves. The seeds provide food for pheasants, quail, turkeys, doves, and songbirds.

Biofuel Source: Interest in switchgrass as a renewable biofuel resource has been increasing in recent years, primarily in the Southern United States. The Booneville, Arkansas, Plant Materials Center (PMC) and the Plant and Soil Science Department of Oklahoma State University (OSU) are cooperating to evaluate several upland types of

switchgrass for use as a biomass energy resource. Selections of upland types of switchgrass have been evaluated by OSU for several years. The development of hybrid progeny with substantial heterosis for increased biomass yield will ultimately result in improved hybrid cultivars for the Central and Southern United States. The PMC is in the process of assessing several improved lines along with commercially available cultivars for dry-matter potential and environmental adaptation. Results of this study may contribute to producers cashing in on a growing demand for renewable fuels and a decrease on our dependency on fossil fuels.

Status

Please consult the PLANTS Web site and your State Department of Natural Resources for this plant's current status (e.g. threatened or endangered species, state noxious status, and wetland indicator values).

Weediness

This plant may become weedy or invasive in some regions or habitats and may displace desirable vegetation if not properly managed. Please consult with your local NRCS Field Office, Cooperative Extension Service office, or state natural resource or agriculture department regarding its status and use. Weed information is also available from the PLANTS Web site at plants.usda.gov.

Description

Panicum virgatum L., switchgrass, is native to all of the United States except California and the Pacific Northwest. It is a perennial sod-forming grass that grows 3 to 5 feet tall and can be distinguished from other warm-season grasses, even when plants are young, by the white patch of hair at the point where the leaf attaches to the stem. The stem is round and usually has a reddish tint. The seed head is an open, spreading panicle.

Prepared By & Species Coordinator:

USDA NRCS Plant Materials Program

For more information about this and other plants, please contact your local NRCS field office or Conservation District, and visit the PLANTS Web site <<http://plants.usda.gov>> or the Plant Materials Program Web site <<http://Plant-Materials.nrcs.usda.gov>>