

SWITCH CANE

Arundinaria gigantea Muhl.
ssp. tecta (Walt.) McClure
Plant Symbol = ARGIT8

Contributed By: USDA NRCS National Plant Data Center



From Hitchcock, A.S. (1950)
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Alternate Names

giant cane, mutton grass, *Arundinaria tecta*

Uses

Switch cane is a good forage plant and is grazed by all livestock. It is grazed mostly in the summer months in the northern part of range and is highly valued as winter forage in the southern Coastal Plain and along the Gulf of Mexico. The robust rhizomes of switch cane bind the soil and protect it from erosion. In southern Mississippi, switch cane is called mutton grass, because of its value as sheep forage.

Status

Please consult the PLANTS Web site and your State Department of Natural Resources for this plant's current status, such as, state noxious status and wetland indicator values.

Description

Grass Family (Poaceae). Switch cane is a native, warm-season, robust, rhizomatous and woody perennial grass. The height is between 4 and 10 feet. The leaf blade is lance-shaped; the underside is usually hairy. The leaf sheath is commonly as long as internodes; ring of short, stiff hair across collar. The stem is round, hollow, and woody. The rhizomes in the air canals in the periphery continue through nodes. The inflorescence is a raceme produced on top of leafless or nearly leafless stems.

Distribution: For current distribution, please consult the Plant Profile page for this species on the PLANTS Web site.

Management

The leaves along the stem are within easy reach of most livestock. They sometimes "ride down" large plants to get the terminal leaves. Removing more than 50 percent of green leaves weakens the plant. This is particularly true in August when plant food reserves are lowest.

Establishment

Switch cane grows all year if conditions are favorable. The leaves are produced from buds at nodes along the stems and it produces seedheads in early fall. It reproduces primarily from rhizomes. Air canals in the rhizomes may help the grass plant adapt to waterlogged soils or frequently flooded sites. It grows in pure stands on most sites and grows best in swampy woods and sandy flood plains.

Cultivars, Improved and Selected Materials (and area of origin)

Please contact your local NRCS Field Office.

Reference

Leithead, H.L., L.L. Yarlett, & T.N. Shiflett. 1976. 100 native forage grasses in 11 southern states. USDA SCS *Agriculture Handbook No. 389*, Washington, DC.

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Program Web site <<http://Plant-Materials.nrcs.usda.gov>>

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