

GRAZING REED CANARYGRASS

Many of us have wetland pastures that contain lots of reed canarygrass. For many of you, it might be the first perennial grass ready for grazing this spring.

Reed canarygrass produces high yields and grows very well in wetlands. It also grows well in well-drained soils. It would be one of our most popular pasture grasses if it wasn't so hard to graze due to problems it has with low palatability.

Reed canarygrass has two things working against it. First, it naturally contains some unpalatable compounds called alkaloids that discourage animals from eating it. Secondly, the plant produces a course stem that makes it difficult to eat.

If you have reed canarygrass pasture, the only way I have found to use it effectively is to always graze it before it gets very tall. Ideally, this means that when the grass gets about eight to ten inches tall, and no taller, immediately graze it down to three or four inches in just a couple of days and then move off to another grazing area. When it regrows back to eight to ten inches tall, graze it again. Every time it regrows, graze it again.

During fast growth in spring, you might need to graze the same area every two or three weeks. This takes some dedication, planning, and intensive management. If the grass gets away from you, animals will just nibble at some leaves, trampling the rest. Then you might be better off cutting the taller growth for hay, followed by renewing your intensive grazing as regrowth begins.

Reed canarygrass is not as bad a pasture grass as many people think. But it does take some knowledge about the plant and some dedicated management to get good use from it.

Dr. Bruce Anderson, Extension Forage Specialist
University of Nebraska-Lincoln
314 Keim Hall—East Campus
Lincoln NE 68583-0915
402-4742-2577
banderson1@unl.edu

