

ENVIRONMENTAL HORTICULTURE

Environmental Horticulture #EH442



PANICUM

PRODUCTION AND CONSUMER CARE

Thomas M. Blessington, David L. Clement, and Kevin G. Williams
Central Maryland Research and Education Center
University of Maryland

INTRODUCTION

- Common name: Switch Grass
- Scientific name: *Panicum sp.*
- Native to central and eastern North America
- Perennial grass growing in clumps 3-6' tall
- Leaf blades grow 0.5'' wide and up to 30'' long
- Small pinkish flowers are borne in open 10'' panicles
- Plants typically turn pale yellow in fall, although some cultivars demonstrate more striking colors
- Often considered a good candidate for biofuels

- Hardy in zones 4-9

GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT

- Grows well in full sun or partial shade
- Prefers deep sandy loam media
- Grows poorly in heavy soils
- Tolerate a wide range of pH conditions
- Performs best when burned every 3-5 years

PROPAGATION

- Normally propagated from seed
- Seeds should be planted 1/4-1/2'' deep

- If planted in fall, seeds will sprout when soil temperatures reach 68°F in spring
- Full foliage will not develop until the third year
- Plants can be propagated by division, but root clumps are often difficult to untangle

DISORDERS

- Rust (*Puccinia sp.*)
 - Brown powdery areas form on leaves and stems
 - Remove infected foliage
- Leaf spot (*Bipolaris oryzae*)
 - Brown leaf spots appear shortly after seedling emergence
 - Symptoms can be reduced by balanced fertilization

CONSUMER CARE

- Often used in wildflower meadows intended to mimic North American prairies

- Provides good winter cover for small mammals and birds
- Can be mowed down to 8'' in winter if desired

CULTIVARS AND SPECIES

- *Panicum amarum*
 - 'Dewey Blue': blue color, fountain habit, airy flowers in fall
- *Panicum virgatum*
 - 'Dallas Blues': bright blue leaves form vase-like clumps
 - 'Northwind': strong upright grower with wide steel-blue foliage
 - 'Shenandoah': green foliage turns deep red in midsummer, red flowers

References

- http://www.floridata.com/ref/P/pani_vir.cfm
- <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Switchgrass>
- <http://www.flower-gardening-made-easy.com/Panicum-virgatum.html>