

FGCU Food Forest

Plant Database

Sugarcane (*Saccharum officinarum*)

Quick Facts

Origin: South/Southeast Asia.

Description: Sugarcane is a giant grass in the Poaceae family that grows in clumps, and can reach 20 ft. tall at full maturity. Leaves are sharp and can be 3 ft. long or longer.

Uses: Food and drink.

Harvest: Year-round; commercial operations usually harvest from late-October through mid-April.

Flower: Sugarcane flowers during the winter months in Florida. Plumes are white and red, and consist of thousands of tiny flowers, each able to produce one seed.

Tolerance: Low salt tolerance; cold hardy down to at least 28°F; high drought tolerance once established; moderate wind tolerance. Prefers well-drained soils and full sun.



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General Description: Sugarcane is a large, perennial true grass in the *Saccharum* genera. It features large, jointed stalks that can reach 20 ft. tall at full maturity, and long, sharp leaves that can be 3 ft. long or longer at full maturity. Sugarcane is the main source of refined, crystalline sugar.

- **Native Origin:** South and Southeast Asia; modern *Saccharum officinarum* species are hybrids between India's *S. barberi* and New Guinea's *S. officinarum* and *S. edule*.
- **General History:** Sugarcane has been grown in south Asia for thousands of years, and is commonly found throughout the tropics and subtropics worldwide. Sugarcane domestication and production can be traced back to New Guinea around 6000 BC, although the earliest known evidence of crystalline sugar production is known from northern India. Since 6000 BC, sugarcane and sugar products were traded throughout Asia, the Middle East, and Africa. By the 10th century, sugarcane appeared in the Americas along with a variety of other crops, and Europe became heavily involved in the trade. From the 11th century to the 19th century, the

international sugarcane industry grew dramatically, and was mostly controlled by European nations. Slavery and indentured servitude was very common. Sugarcane is Florida's most important crop, and Florida is the largest producer of sugarcane in the United States.

- **Distribution:** Tropics and Subtropics worldwide; Brazil leads the world in production.
- **Season of Harvest:** Year-round; commercial operations usually harvest their sugarcane from late-October through mid-April in Florida.
- **Culinary Uses:** Sugarcane can be chewed raw or pressed into a juice, syrup, or molasses. Almost all crystallized sugar is produced from sugarcane worldwide. Sugarcane juice, made with ice and lemon, is common in many South and Central American cuisines. Alcoholic beverages, such as rum or Brazil's Cachaça, are also made from sugarcane, and are popular worldwide in many cultures.

Sugarcane	
Scientific Classification	
Kingdom:	Plantae
(unranked):	Angiosperms
(unranked):	Monocots
(unranked):	Commelinids
Order:	Poales
Family:	Poaceae
Genus:	<i>Saccharum</i>
Species:	<i>S. officinarum</i>

Sources

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