

# ~MCGILLIVRAY PIPING~

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## **Making your chanter reed easier**

If your chanter reed is a bit hard, be patient for a day or two to see if it will ease up on its own. If it doesn't, or if it is too hard initially for you to be able to play, here are some things you can do to make it easier.

### ***“REED MASSAGE” OR HARD SQUEEZE***

If a reed is only slightly too hard for you, you can help the blowing-in process by 'massaging' the reed lightly. Hold the top half-inch of the reed blades between your thumb and forefinger and squeeze gently until the blade tips come together, then release. Repeat this process in a gentle massaging action 25 or 30 times over a 30-second period. This warms and stretches the cane and will ease the reed up temporarily. If the reed blows in you won't need to repeat this action. If this doesn't ease the reed up sufficiently, hold the reed on the sound box (lower half of the blades) between the thumb and forefinger and give it a hard squeeze so you can feel the cane give way a bit.

### ***RUBBER BAND BRIDLE***

Sometimes the blowing-in process can be helped by taking a small dental elastic (1/4 inch or less), and placing it doubled or tripled on the blades on the sound box. The higher you place the bridle on the blades, the easier the reed will get. You should note that this also makes the top hand of the reed slightly sharper. As the reed gets easier you can slide the bridle down the blades and off.

### ***SCRAPING OR SANDING***

If the reed is far too hard for you to blow, or isn't blowing in as you'd hoped, you may wish to scrape or sand the blades a bit. There are basically two types of chanter reeds in use today: the *profiled reed* such as MacPhee, Gilmour, Wilson, Henderson Soutar or Elliott, which does not have a pronounced shoulder, and the *ridgecut* (Ross, Warnock), which has very thin blade ends and a very pronounced shoulder.

### ***Profiled Reeds***

For scraping profiled reeds use a factory sharp utility knife or 220 grit sandpaper or emery paper. Hold the knife perpendicular to the reed blades and scrape cane on the sides or edges of the reed in the 3/8 inch section shown below. Go up and down, not sideways against the grain. If you use sandpaper, fold the paper over the edge of a table and rub the sides and edges of the reed up and down (with the grain) on the paper. Round the edges of the blades as you go. Take the same amount off all four edges. Massage the reed and test frequently as you go. Sometimes a very light scraping or sanding in the dead centre of the reed blades will free a slightly hard reed up nicely, but be careful: too much and you'll flatten some notes (D, F) beyond repair.

### ***Ridgecut Reeds***

For ridgecut reeds, you can scrape or cut in one of two ways. You can use the same scraping methods described above, but address a different area of the reed. Scrape or sand the upper portion of the reed, from the angled portion at the top of the sound box almost to the tips. See the diagram below for details.

The second scraping method is a little more dramatic. It requires you to use a knife to gouge out cane quite ruthlessly in a 'C' shape right on the crest of the sound box on all four edges. Don't be shy. This method works superbly to ease ridgecut reeds without affecting their tone. See the diagram below for details.

By the way, while these are the methods I use for scraping reeds, they aren't the only methods. Don't be afraid to experiment.

Good luck!

