



Colorado
State
University

Extension

Best Native Grasses for Eagle County (May 2007)

CSU Extension in Eagle County (970) 328-8630

<i>Achnatherum (Oryzopsis) hymenoides</i>	Indian ricegrass
<i>Bouteloua curtipendula</i>	Sideoats grama
<i>Bouteloua gracilis (Chondrosum gracile)</i>	Blue grama
<i>Bromus marginatus</i>	Mountain brome
<i>Deschampsia caespitosa</i>	Tufted hairgrass
<i>Elymus elymoides (Sitanion hystrix)</i>	Bottlebrush squirreltail
<i>Elymus lanceolatus (Agropyron riparium)</i>	Streambank wheatgrass
<i>Elymus trachycaulus (Agropyron trachycaulum)</i>	Slender wheatgrass
<i>Festuca arizonica</i>	Arizona fescue
<i>Festuca idahoensis</i>	Idaho fescue
<i>Festuca saximontana</i>	Rocky Mountain fescue
<i>Koeleria macrantha</i>	Junegrass
<i>Nasella (Stipa) viridula</i>	Green needlegrass
<i>Pascopyrum (Agropyron) smithii</i>	Western wheatgrass
<i>Schizachyrium scoparium (Andropogon scoparius)</i>	Little bluestem

General Information:

Even with normal precipitation, trying to establish new grass under dryland conditions can be difficult. Generally, the best time to seed is in the late fall, just before the first significant snowfall. The seeds will then germinate in the spring. The other time in Colorado for seeding is in late June or early July, just before the monsoons. This can be successful if the rains come in the right amount and over a long enough period of time or supplemental water is provided. Seeding with a grass drill is the most successful practice, but most small land owners or homeowners do not have access to a drill. Broadcast seeding is a viable option especially for smaller areas. For broadcast seeding double the seeding rate. First, rough up the ground before sowing the seeds, then rake in the seeds and tamp the ground afterwards to establish good seed to soil contact. Grasses prefer full sun unless otherwise noted.

Seed Sources: (no endorsement of companies is implied by their listing, nor is criticism implied for companies not listed.)

Arkansas Valley Seed Solutions (800) 782-5947

4625 Colorado Blvd.

Denver, CO 80216

(877) 957-3337

Plants of the Southwest

3095 Agua Fria Rd

Santa Fe, NM 87507

(505) 438-8888

Sharp Bros. Seed Co.

104 East 4th Street Rd.

Greeley, CO 80631

(800) 421-4234

Pawnee Buttes Seed Co.

PO Box 100

Greeley CO 80632

Seed Sources continued:

Southwest Seed

13260 CR 29

Dolores, CO 81323

(970) 565-8722

Western Native Seed

P.O. Box 188

Coaldale, CO 81222

(719) 942-3935

Native grass descriptions:

***Achnatherum (Oryzopsis) hymenoides* - Indian ricegrass**

Cool season grass, 12-24" in height, grows to 9,000' in elevation. Delicate, lacy bunchgrass with attractive showy panicles. Very low water use. Short lived. Edible seeds. Most well-drained soils.

***Andropogon gerardii* – Big bluestem**

Warm season grass, 48-72" in height, grows to 7,500' (6,500') in elevation. Robust bunchgrass with upright growth. Turns red-burgundy in the fall with color retention well into winter. Tolerates most soils (especially clay) and water regimes. (*For lower elevations in Eagle County experiment with this grass in landscape settings with warm microclimates*).

***Bouteloua curtipendula* – Sideoats grama**

Warm season grass, 24-36" in height, grows to 7,500' in elevation (maybe to 8,500'). Bunchgrass with small pennant-like seeds on one side of stem. Very low water use. Most well-drained soils.

***Bouteloua gracilis (Chondrosum gracile)* - Blue grama (“eyelash” grass)**

Warm season grass, 6-20" in height, grows to 9,500' in elevation. Bunchgrass with large curved flowering spikes that resemble eyelashes. Excellent lawn alternative. Withstands moderate traffic and light shade. Low water use.

***Bromus marginatus* – Mountain brome**

Cool season short-lived perennial bunchgrass, 12-48" in height, grows to 10,000' in elevation. Well adapted to all moist soil types. Well adapted to thin infertile soils and establishes quickly on disturbed sites. Grows in open woods, aspen groves, shrublands and meadows. Often the dominant species on shaded mountain soils. Tolerates partial shade.

***Deschampsia caespitosa* – Tufted hairgrass**

Cool season long-lived dense tufted perennial bunchgrass, 18-36" in height, grows to 14,000' in elevation. Common on moist to wet meadows along wooded streams and in forest openings, especially spruce-fir. Full sun to partial shade.

***Elymus elymoides (Sitanion hystrix)* - Bottlebrush squirreltail**

Cool season short-lived perennial bunchgrass, stems 4-20" in height, grows to 14,000' in elevation. Found on dry hills, open woods, meadows and rocky slopes. Very drought tolerant. Tolerant of deep and shallow soils. Easy to establish, good for disturbed sites.

Native grass descriptions continued:

Flower heads are bristly spikes with spreading awns. The seedhead breaks apart when mature.

Elymus lanceolatus ssp. psammophilus (Agropyron riparium)

– Streambank wheatgrass

Cool season strongly rhizomatous perennial bunchgrass, small to medium in height, grows to 11,500' in elevation. Sod-former with extensive rhizomes that occupies wetter sites and is more productive in finer textured (heavier) soils. Drought tolerant. Full sun to partial shade.

Elymus trachycaulus ssp. trachycaulus (Agropyron trachycaulum)

– Slender wheatgrass

Cool season short-lived perennial bunchgrass with very short rhizomes, 1-4' in height, grows to 13,000' in elevation. Found in dry mountain meadows, hillsides, open woods in aspen, lodgepole pine and Engelmann spruce forests. Tolerates saline (salty) soil conditions. Adapted to a wide range of sites and is moderately drought tolerant. Establishes easily and quickly. Useful where quick, native, non-aggressive perennial cover is desired. Full sun to partial shade.

***Festuca arizonica* – Arizona fescue**

Cool season grass, 10-24" in height, grows to 10,000' in elevation or higher. Graceful clumping bunchgrass with fine-textured blue-green leaves. Low water use. Tolerates light shade but not traffic.

***Festuca idahoensis* - Idaho fescue**

Cool season densely tufted perennial bunchgrass, 1-3' in height, grows to 11,500' in elevation. Hillsides, ridges, meadows, open lodgepole pine and aspen forests. Drought tolerant. Most adapted to deep, fertile heavy soils, but does occur on thin well-drained sandy soils. Not strongly competitive as seedlings, yet mature established stands become strongly competitive. Full sun to partial shade.

***Festuca saximontana* - Rocky Mountain fescue**

Cool season compact densely tufted bunchgrass, 8-18" in height, grows to 11,500' in elevation. Occurs on rocky sites and in open woods and slopes in sagebrush, aspen-spruce-fir, lodgepole pine and montane grass communities. Requires coarse well-drained soils. Full sun to partial shade.

***Koeleria macrantha* - June grass**

Cool season grass, 12-24" in height, grows to 11,000' in elevation. Bunchgrass with attractive open panicles of flowers. Great mixed with low-growing perennials. Low water use but will tolerate wetter sites. Most soils and light shade.

***Nassella (Stipa) viridula* – Green needlegrass**

Cool season long-lived coarse perennial bunchgrass, 2-4' in height, grows to 10,000' in elevation. Commonly occurs on dry slopes, foothills and mountain meadows. Fibrous

Native grass descriptions continued:

root system is extensive and deep. Adapted to a wide variety of sites and thrives on heavy soils.

***Pascopyrum (Agropyron) smithii*– Western wheatgrass**

Cool season grass, 12-40" in height, grows to 10,500' in elevation. Sod-forming grass with upright blue leaves and spikes. Most soils. Because it is strongly rhizomatous, use only where there is adequate growing space.

***Schizachyrium scoparium (Andropogon scoparius)* – Little bluestem**

Warm season grass, 12-48" in height, grows to 7,500' in elevation or higher. Upright growing bunchgrass with green to blue-green leaves and fluffy seed heads that catch the light, persisting through winter. Fall color is a red to bronze, which fades slowly in winter. Good for clay soils, but tolerates most. Low to moderate water use, but can be short-lived without additional water.

Additional species: *Bromus ciliatus* - Fringed brome, *Muhlenbergia montana* – mountain muhly, *Poa alpina* - Alpine bluegrass, *Poa fendleriana* – Mutton grass, *Trisetum spicatum* – Spike trisetum