

## ALKALI SACATON

*Sporobolu airoides* (Torr.)

Torr.

Plant Symbol = SPAI

Contributed by: USDA NRCS National Plant Data Center



R. Mohlenbrock  
USDA, NRCS, Wetland Sciences Institute  
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### Alternative Names

giant sacaton, finetop saltgrass, hairgrass dropseed, zacaton alcalino

### Uses

*Ethnobotanic:* The Hopi Indians use the seeds in times of famine (Whiting 1939). They were ground into flour, eaten dry or made into a mush.

*Wildlife:* Alkali sacaton's abundant herbage is eaten by cattle, sheep, and horses (Hitchcock 1951). This species is used as a good forage or grazing grass in lowland and in alkali regions (Gates 1937).

### Status

Please consult the Plants Web site and your State Department of Natural Resources for this plant's current status, such as, state noxious status and wetland indicator values.

### Description

*General:* Grass Family (Poaceae). Alkali sacaton is a tough perennial two to three and a half feet tall, growing in large bunches. The culms are erect to spreading and range in height from 50 to 100 centimeters tall. The blades are elongate, flat, soon becoming involute, and usually less than four millimeters wide (Hitchcock 1951).

*Distribution:* Alkali sacaton ranges from South Dakota to Washington, south to Missouri, Kansas, Texas, and Mexico (Steyermark 1963). For current distribution, please consult the Plant profile page for this species on the PLANTS Web site.

### Adaptation

Alkali sacaton grows on dry to moist sites with sand or gravelly soil. This species is often found growing on alkaline flats, prairies, and sandy plateaus. It is common along drainage in desert and semi-desert areas.

### Establishment

*Propagation by Seed:* Alkali sacaton seeds should be sown in the spring in a greenhouse. Cover the seeds with a light layer of the growing media. Germination for this species should take place within two weeks. When seedlings are large enough to handle, plant them directly into their permanent positions in the summer.

Large divisions can be planted directly into their permanent positions. However, smaller divisions should be placed in individual pots in a cold frame, planting them when they are well established in the summer.

### Management

Once *Sporobolu airoides* plants are well established little maintenance is required. It is best that the stands of this species is grazed in the spring and summer when growth is active.

### Cultivars, Improved and Selected Materials (and area of origin)

Commonly available through commercial seed vendors. Contact your local Natural Resources Conservation Service (formerly Soil Conservation Service) office for more information. Look in the phone book under "United States Government." The Natural Resources Conservation Service will be

listed under the subheading "Department of Agriculture."

### References

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Whiting, A.F. 1939. *Ethnobotany of the Hopi*. North Arizona Society of Science and Art.

### Prepared By

*Jammie Favorite*

formerly USDA, NRCS, National Plant Data Center, Baton Rouge, Louisiana

### Species Coordinator

*M. Kat Anderson*

USDA, NRCS, National Plant Data Center, c/o Plant Sciences Dept., Davis, California

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For more information about this and other plants, please contact your local NRCS field office or Conservation District, and visit the PLANTS Web site <<http://plants.usda.gov>> or the Plant Materials Program Web site <<http://Plant-Materials.nrcs.usda.gov>>

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