



NRCS

United States Department of Agriculture
Natural Resources Conservation Service

Cape May Plant Materials Center

COASTAL BLUESTEM

***Schizachyrium scoparium*
var. *littorale* (Michx.) Nash**
plant symbol = SCSC

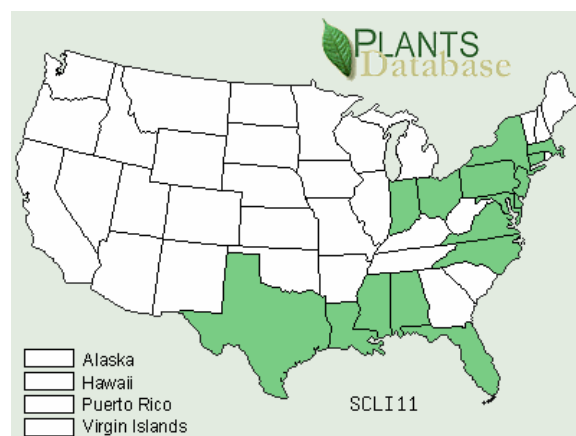
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Description

Coastal bluestem (*Schizachyrium scoparium* var. *littoralis*) occurs almost exclusively along the coastal strip from southern New England to Texas. It is a short (1-2 foot) bunch grass with coarse blue-green stems and basal leaves which often appear purplish. Coastal bluestem is very similar to the inland little bluestem but can be distinguished by the bent stems at the base, whereas little bluestem stems are erect. Leaves are smooth, but frequently are covered with hair at the base next to the sheath. Leaves tend to fold with maturity. Seed head clusters are about three inches long and consist of a number of short, silvery hairs (awns) when the seeds are ripe. In the late summer to early fall a low sun slanting across the seed heads of this grass give the plant a frosty appearance. As a warm season grass, it begins growth in late spring and continues through the hot summer period until the first killing frost. The entire plant has a reddish cast after frost. Ragged brownish-tan stems often persist through the winter.

Known distribution



Uses

Dune Stabilization: Coastal bluestem is useful for adding plant diversity to frontal back dune and secondary dune systems. It is especially well-suited for stabilizing back dune “blow-out” areas.

Wildlife: This plant provides cover for ground birds and small mammals.

Landscaping: With its blue-green leaves during the growing season and attractive rusty color with white fluffy seedheads in the fall, coastal bluestem is useful as an ornamental planting in coastal landscapes.

Status

Please consult the PLANTS Web site and your State Department of Natural Resources for this plant’s current status (e.g. threatened or endangered species, state noxious status, and wetland indicator values).

Adaptation

Coastal bluestem is very well adapted to dry, well to excessively drained, infertile secondary dunes. It does not tolerate large amounts of sand accretion. This grass has excellent drought tolerance once established, some salt spray

tolerance and poor flood tolerance. It grows preferentially on sites with pH 7.0 and slightly higher.

Establishment

Seeding methods for this species have not been developed for backdune stabilization. Chopping stems with mature seed attached into the sand may result in some natural recruitment. However, the most reliable method of establishment is planting plugs of this species on a 2-3 foot spacing between rows of beachgrass. A soluble fertilizer such as 10-10-10 applied at the same rate as for American beachgrass (200-400 lbs./ac.) will be beneficial for stand establishment of the coastal bluestem.

Management

No special management requirements have been developed.

Pests and Potential Problems

There are no serious pests of coastal bluestem.

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

A Mid-Atlantic ecotype of coastal bluestem is currently under development by the Cape May Plant Materials Center.

Prepared By & Species Coordinator:

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