

## GOLDEN NUTSEEDGE

### *Cyperus eragrostis* Lam.

Plant Symbol = CYER

Contributed By: USDA NRCS National Plant Data Center



Alfred Brousseau  
© Brother Eric Vogel, St. Mary's College  
© CalPhotos

#### Alternate Names

Nutgrass, tall nutgrass, umbrella sedge, chufa, Earth almond, nutgrass, zula nuts, edible galingale

#### Uses

**Ethnobotanic:** On the rootlets of the sedge are small tubers, the size of dried currants. These tubers make an excellent meal, either raw or steamed. They are hard and crisp when eaten raw. These tubers taste between fresh coconut and raisins. When reduced to meal and cooked as cereal, it is both nourishing and appetizing. They can be soaked in water, then pounded to release the milky juice, which can be mixed with alcohol or water and sugar to make delicious drinks. Peeled and roasted, the tubers can be ground to become a coffee substitute or a sweet flour. The base of the stem may be eaten raw. The Yokuts in California ate the grass-nut of *Cyperus* species and the seeds of the same (Powers 1877). Native Americans use golden nutsedge as both sewing and wrapping material in coiled baskets. Nutsedge leaves were made into seats.

**Erosion Control:** Nutsedge is especially good for stabilizing or restoring disturbed or degraded areas (including logged or burned areas) for erosion and slope control and for wildlife food and cover. *Cyperus* species may be less suitable for general garden use, as these plants are also invasive. Once

established, these plants tend to out-compete, displace, or overrun others.

**Wildlife:** The seeds are important, commonly used foods of ducks and of certain marshbirds and shorebirds. Ducks, sandhill cranes, crow, other waterfowl, and small mammals such as the kangaroo rat eat the seeds. The tubers are eaten in the winter by ducks and geese.

#### 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:** Sedge Family (Cyperaceae). This perennial herb has long, solid triangular stems from 10 - 90 cm in height. The slender, grass-like leaves grow from the base of the stem, and about 2-6 involucre leaves exceed the inflorescence. The flowers are golden-brown colored, umbellate or capitate, with the rays extending out from a central point with clusters of spikelets on the ends. Flowers and fruits spread out in feathery spikes almost like the ends of an umbrella (thus the name umbrella sedge). The plant has scaly stolons terminating in nut-like tubers.

#### Distribution

For current distribution, please consult the Plant Profile page for this species on the PLANTS Web site. It occurs in many plant communities in most of cismontane California, north to Oregon, south to Mexico and temperate South America. A related species, yellow nutsedge (*Cyperus esculentus*) is a worldwide weed (Hickman 1993).

#### Establishment

**Adaptation:** These sedges prefer mud flats that are underwater during the winter months. Nutsedges grow in vernal pools, streambanks, ditches, lawns, gardens, and disturbed places at elevations from 0 - 1000 m. *Cyperus eragrostis* is common in shallow water and on moist ground at elevations from 0 - 700 m.

**General:** *Cyperus* species may be planted from bare root stock, from seedlings from container stalk, or directly seeded into the soil. Seed collection is easy, efficient, cost-effective, and non-destructive. Bare rootstock or seedlings are preferred revegetation

methods where there is moving water. No more than 1/4 of the plants in an area should be collected.

These plants establish extremely well from seed. Seed production is prolific and germination rates are high. In wetland areas, revegetation of *Cyperus* occurs naturally where there is water, wind, or animal dispersal, or from the seed bank. It is likely that *Cyperus* will re-vegetate naturally; seeding or planting in native plant communities is not a good idea because of its invasive nature. This plant grows in gardens that are irrigated, or where there is some natural moisture.

#### ***Establishment from Seed***

- Collect nutgrass seed in the fall and broadcast seed in late fall or early spring. Seeds can be broadcast on a moist and bare soil surface. Cover with a shallow layer of soil.
- To collect and store seed, collect when seed is ripe and store in a dry and cool place. Clean seed by blowing out the light seed.
- Plant seeds in the greenhouse in 1" x 1" x 2" pots, 1/4" under the soil surface. Keep soil surface moist. Put in temperature of 100 degrees F (plus or minus 5 degrees). Seeds begin to germinate after a couple weeks in warm temperatures.
- Plants are ready in 100 - 120 days to come out as plugs. By planting seeds in August, plugs are ready to plant in soil by November. These plants are very small; growing plants to a larger size will result in increased revegetation success.
- Nutsedge would do well grown in wild gardens or cultivated for its edible tubers. *Cyperus* species tolerate disturbance, moderate grazing, and trampling.

#### **Management**

Hydrology is the most important factor in determining wetland type, revegetation, success, and wetland function and value. Changes in water levels influence species composition, structure, and distribution of plant communities. Water management is absolutely critical during plant establishment, and remains crucial through the life of the wetland for proper community management.

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

CYER is readily available through native plant nurseries within its range. 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**

Barrows, D.P. 1967. *Ethno-botany of the Coahuilla Indians*. Malki Museum Press, Banning, California. 82 pp.

Hickman, J.C. (ed.) 1993. *The Jepson manual*. University of California Press. 1400 pp.

Powers, S. 1976. *Tribes of California*. University of California Press. 480 pp.

Martin, A.C., H.S. Zim, & A.L. Nelson 1951. *American wildlife and plants: A guide to wildlife food habits*. Dover Publications, Inc., New York, New York. 500 pp.

Murphy, E.V.A. 199?. *Indian uses of native plants*. Mendocino County Historical Society. 81 pp.

Sampson, A.W. & B.S. Jespersen 1981. *California range brushlands and browse plants*. Division of Agricultural Sciences. University of California.

USDA, NRCS 1999. *The PLANTS database*. National Plant Data Center, Baton Rouge, Louisiana. Version: 990405.

#### **Prepared By**

*Michelle Stevens*

Formerly USDA, NRCS, National Plant Data Center

#### **Species Coordinator**

*M. Kat Anderson*

USDA, NRCS, National Plant Data Center, c/o Plant Science Department, University of California, Davis, California

Edited: 05dec00 jsp; 01may03 ahv; 05jun06 jsp

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>>

*The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) prohibits discrimination in all its programs and activities on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, religion, age, disability, political beliefs, sexual orientation, and marital or family status. (Not all prohibited bases apply to all programs.) Persons with disabilities who require alternative means for communication of program information (Braille, large print, audiotape, etc.) should contact USDA's TARGET Center at 202-720-2600 (voice and TDD).*

*To file a complaint of discrimination write USDA, Director, Office of Civil Rights, Room 326-W, Whitten Building, 14th and Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, DC 20250-9410 or call*

202-720-5964 (voice or TDD). USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

Read about [Civil Rights at the Natural Resources Conservation Service.](#)