USDA NRCS
United States Department of Agriculture
Natural Resources Conservation Service

Plant Fact Sheet

SALTMEADOW CORDGRASS

Spartina patens (Ait.) Muhl.

Plant Symbol = SPPA

Contributed by: USDA NRCS Plant Materials Program

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Uses
Saltmeadow cordgrass is used for shoreline protection and tidal marsh restorations, and is sometimes utilized for sand dune stabilization plantings. In its natural state on the tidal marshes, dense stands of this grass cause suspended solids to settle out of floodwaters and take up available nutrients. This cordgrass also provides food and cover to a limited number of animals. This species is the primary component of salt hay, which is utilized in the landscape and vegetable trade as a weed seed free mulch.

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).

Weediness
This plant may become weedy or invasive in some regions or habitats and may displace desirable vegetation if not properly managed. Please consult with your local NRCS Field Office, Cooperative Extension Service office, or state natural resource or agriculture department regarding its status and use. Weed information is also available from the PLANTS Web site at plants.usda.gov.

Description
This warm season, native, perennial grows from 1 to 3 feet tall, and spreads extensively by long slender rhizomes. Dark green stems emerge from the rhizomes. The rolled leaf blades are typically 1/2 to 1 foot long, and 0.1 to 0.2 inches wide. Leaves are drooping and wiry in appearance. From late June to October an inflorescence emerges at the end of the stem, which is composed of 2 to 10 two-inch-long spikelets. The numerous florets are 0.3 to 0.4 inches long and arranged in an overlapping scale-like fashion on each spikelet. The flowers are wind pollinated.

Adaptation and Distribution
Saltmeadow cordgrass is commonly found growing on open coastal marshes from normal high tide to about 13 feet, from Newfoundland to Quebec, south to Florida and Texas; it can also be found along the shores of the Great Lakes. This grass is adapted to a wide range of soils from coarse sands to silty clay sediments with pHs ranging from 3.7 to 7.9. Saltmeadow cordgrass will tolerate irregular inundations with 0 to 35 parts per thousand salinity.

For a current distribution map, please consult the Plant Profile page for this species on the PLANTS Website.

Establishment
Due to sparse seed production, saltmeadow cordgrass is usually propagated by vegetative stem divisions. Depending on the energy effecting the planting site, either containerized (high impact sites)or bare root (mild impact sites) plants can be utilized. Bare root material should contain 3 to 5 stems per planting unit, while containers should have at least 5 to 8 healthy stems. Since most marsh sites are irregular and

difficult to access, hand planting is normally employed, using spades, dibbles, or planting bars. If site conditions are right, planting can be carried out with a mechanical, tractor drawn transplanter. Plant spacing should be between 18 and 36 inches; up to 2 feet of lateral spread can be expected annually.

In nursery rows, plants of saltmeadow cordgrass should be spaced 6 to 12 inches apart. Under ideal nursery conditions, each planting unit should be able to yield up to 50 stems in a single growing season. Effective weed control is essential to producing quality plants.

Management
Stems and rhizomes of this grass respond well to applications of well balanced commercial fertilizers. Plants propagated under nursery conditions may need to be irrigated if the site is not moist year round to encourage good growth and spread. Plants in production are usually placed on sandy textured soils and allowed to spread by rhizomes for 1 to 3 years, after which they are under-cut and uplifted for distribution.

Pests and Potential Problems
There are no detrimental pests documented to impact this species. Non-threatening rust-like funguses (orange fruiting bodies on leaves) are commonly found on *S. patens* plants.

Cultivars, Improved, and Selected Materials (and area of origin)
There are three named cultivars available on the commercial market. In 1986, 'Avalon' (New Jersey) saltmeadow cordgrass was released for use in the coastal area north of the Carolinas by the Cape May Plant Material Center, in Cape May Court House, New Jersey. Soon after, 'Flageo' (North Carolina) was released by the Americus, Georgia and Brooksville, Florida PMCs for use on southern Atlantic and Gulf coasts. 'Sharp' (Louisiana) was released in 1994 by the Florida and Georgia PMCs for coastal back dune stabilization in the southern Atlantic and Gulf coast counties from Florida to Texas. It is also suited for use in inland areas from southern Georgia to southern Arkansas to stabililize shorelines, gullies, road banks, mine spoils, saline oil seep areas, and for nutrient reclamation in agricultural and municipal waste water irrigated fields.

Control
Please contact your local agricultural extension specialist or county weed specialist to learn what works best in your area and how to use it safely. Always read label and safety instructions for each control method. Trade names and control measures appear in this document only to provide specific information. USDA, NRCS does not guarantee or warranty the products and control methods named, and other products may be equally effective.

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05Feb2002 JLK; 24may06jsp; 15jun07 jmg; 29jun07 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>