

BLUE GRAMA

Bouteloua gracilis (Willd. ex
Kunth.) Lag. ex Griffiths
Plant Symbol = BOGR2

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Program



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Uses

Livestock: In southern states, blue grama grows as a bunchgrass; in northern states or areas of heavy grazing pressure, it is a sod former.

Erosion control: Blue grama is suitable for mixtures of grasses used in erosion control, low maintenance turf plantings, and surface mine revegetation.

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).

Description

Bouteloua gracilis, blue grama, is a major warm season grass found throughout the Great Plains. The plant is fairly short, reaching 10 to 20 inches with narrow basal leaves of 3 to 6 inches. Blue grama grows in definite bunches and reproduces by tillering and by seed. Mature seed heads are curved, resembling a human eyebrow. Blue grama can be found growing in association with buffalograss, western wheatgrass, needlegrasses and in some areas the bluegrasses.

Adaptation and Distribution

Blue grama demonstrates good drought, fair salinity, and moderate alkalinity tolerances. In its dormant state, it will also tolerate burning. Blue grama will not tolerate dense shade, flooding, a high water table, or acid soils.

Blue grama is distributed throughout the western United States. For a current distribution map, please consult the Plant Profile page for this species on the PLANTS Website.

Establishment

As with all native grasses, proper ground preparation is one of the most important considerations. The seedbed should be firm but not solid; cultivation to kill the roots of cool-season grasses is essential. Planting may be done by either drilling or broadcasting, with the seed being sown no more than 1/4 to 1/2 inches deep at a rate of 1 to 3 pounds PLS/acre. Seeding in late spring is recommended in the Great Plains; earlier seeding is recommended in areas further south. In the Southwest, seeding should be done during the period from June 15 to July 15. Mulching and irrigation is recommended on harsh sites. Soil tests should be made to test the soils for deficiencies. Blue grama will tolerate low-nutrient soils better than acidic conditions. Planting should be done by a native grass seed drill. In western areas plant blue grama in a sorghum cover crop, stubble, or in with the crop itself.

Management

Once the grass is established, it is very palatable to livestock all year long. Since growing points are at or near the ground surface, the grass withstands fairly close grazing. For best yields, defer grazing during the growing season every 2 to 3 years. Blue grama cures well on stem, making it a good grass for grazing during the dormant season. Renovation of sodbound stands is also recommended. Weeds can be controlled by use of herbicides, mowing or controlled grazing.

Pests and Potential Problems

There are no known serious pests of blue grama grass.

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

Improved materials include the cultivars ‘Lovington’ (NM), ‘Hachita’ (NM), and ‘Alma’ (NM) and the selected class release Bad River Ecotype (SD). Seeds are available at most commercial seed sources.

Prepared By & Species Coordinator:

USDA NRCS Plant Materials Program

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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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