



Cool & Warm Season Colorado Native Grasses

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Cool Season

Scientific Name	Common Name(s)	Elevation	Exposure	Moisture	Soil	Growth Habit	Mature Size (height x width)	Foliage Color	Texture/Structure	Sow Date Outside	Fauna	Comments
<i>Acnatherum hymenoides</i>	Indian Ricegrass	3400-10,000'	Sun-partial open shade	Dry	Sandy, Rocky	Bunchgrass	1-2' x 1-1.5'	Sage green	Airy	November	Birds, Skipper host	Well-behaved, edible seeds
<i>Deschampsia caespitosa</i>	Tufted Hairgrass	5000-14,000'	Part shade	High-moderate	Adaptable	Tufted clump	2-3' x 1-2'	Dark green	Cloudlike panicle	mid March-mid April, 1/16" cover	Birds	Spikelet purple to tan
<i>Elymus canadensis</i>	Canada Wild Rye	3500-9000'	Sun-half day shade	Moderate-dry	Sand, Loam, Clay, Well drained, pH flexible	Tufted clump	3-4' x 2'	Medium green	Long flat leaves, Nodding, awned inflorescence	mid March-mid April, cover seeds very lightly, need light	Birds, Forage	Blooms first season
<i>Elymus elymoides</i>	Squirreltail Bottlebrush	3500-11,000'	Sun-light open shade	Dry	Rocky, Sandy loam	Short bunchgrass	15-20" x 6"	Medium green	Upright open bottlebrush inflorescence	Afterripen, mid March-April 1, sow at 50-77°F, light cover	Winter forage	Inflorescence tumbles
<i>Festuca idahoensis</i>	Idaho Fescue, Blue Bunchgrass	5800-12,500'	Sun-light open shade	Moderate-dry, well-drained	Sand, Loam, Clay, Well drained	Tidy short bunchgrass	1-2' x 8-10"	Bluish green	Fine basal leaves, Upright inflorescence	Afterripen, mid March-April 7, sow at 50-77°F, light cover	Lepidoptera host, Forage	Climax species; can be used as specimen or as groundcover in larger spaces
<i>Hesperostipa comata</i>	Needle and Thread	3400-10,000'	Sun	Dry	Sandy, Loam, Well drained	Upright clumping tufted bunchgrass	1-3' x 1'	Gray green	Flexible, Thin, Narrow, drooping panicle	Outside fall or sandpaper and sow mid March, 1-2 yo seeds germinate better than fresh	Nesting cover, Early forage	Very sharp awn; protect pets by moving to 6" before fruit matures
<i>Koeleria macrantha</i>	Junegrass	4000-12,000'	Sun-very light shade	Moderate-dry	Various but well drained	Erect bunchgrass	1.3' x 1'	Gray green	Compact blond inflorescence, Basal tuft of leaves	Fall or mid March-April 1	Birds, Skipper host, Bee nesting material	Early growth, silvery green to tan inflorescence
<i>Nassella viridula</i>	Green Needlegrass	1500-8500'	Sun	Dry, Tolerates brief flooding	Sand, Loam, Clay	Upright bunchgrass with tillers	1-3.5' x 1.5'	Gray green	Fine	Sandpaper, mid March-April 1	Forage	Waterfowl nest material
<i>Oryzopsis asperifolia</i>	Roughleaf Ricegrass	5000-10,500'	Open shade-shade	Moderate-dry	Rocky	Basal evergreen leaves erect early, later loose tufts	1.5' x 1.5'	Bright green	Rough	mid March-mid April	Birds	
<i>Pascopyrum smithii</i>	Western Wheatgrass	3500-9500'	Sun	Dry	Sand, Loam, Clay	Erect, Rhizomatous	15-30" x 24"	Blue-gray green	Stiff	mid March-mid April	Birds	Keep dry to avoid a monoculture
<i>Piptatherum micranthum</i>	Littleseed Ricegrass	4500-10,000'	Open shade-partial	Moderate-dry, well-drained	Rocky	Tufted	1-2.5' x .5'	Green	Delicate	March-mid April	Birds	Often in litter under Juniper & Pinyon

Warm Season Grasses

Scientific Name	Common Name(s)	Elevation	Exposure	Moisture	Soil	Growth Habit	Mature Size Height x Width	Color	Texture/Structure	Sow Date Outside	Fauna	Comments
<i>Andropogon gerardii</i>	Big Bluestem	3500-6800'	Sun	Moderate-dry	Sandy loam, well draining clay	Erect bunchgrass	4-6' x 2'	Glauous to reddish bronze in fall	Statuesque but not coarse, Digitate inflorescence	April 1-15, light cover over seeds	Birds	Specimen or back of border
<i>Andropogon hallii</i>	Sand Bluestem	3500-6500'	Sun	Moderate-dry	Sandy	Erect bunchgrass, Slowly rhizomatous	3-6' x 2'	Glauous to rose in fall	Similar to Big Blue but fuller, Fluffy seed heads well above leaves	May, 68°+, light cover over seeds	Birds, Material for nesting bees, Forage	
<i>Aristida arizonica</i>	Arizona Three-awn	4500-6500'	Sun-partial shade	Dry	Sandy, Rocky	Erect bunchgrass, Narrow panicle	1-2.5' x 1-1.5'	Medium green to tan in fall	Airy spike inflorescence, Curly basal leaves in late summer	April 1- May 1, day temp 70+, light cover	Birds, food and nesting	More delicate looking than Purple Three-awn
<i>Aristida purpurea</i>	Purple Three-awn	3500-9000'	Sun-light shade	Moderate-dry	Sandy, Rocky, occ'y Clay, pH 6.5-7.5	Slender tufted bunchgrass, Fountain	2' x 2'	Pale green, Spikelets purple to buff	Silky nodding inflorescence	April 1- May 1, day temp 70+	Birds, Skipper & Satyr host, Nesting material for bees, Small mammals	Naturalize

<i>Bouteloua curtipendula</i>	Sideoats Grama	3500-7500'	Sun-partial shade	Moderate-dry	Sand, Loam, Clay, Well drained, Alkaline	Erect, Tufted bunchgrass, Short rhizomes	1.5-2' x 1'	Blue green to tan in fall	Wiry, Nodding, 1-sided inflorescence	mid April-early July, cover seeds 1/4" & press	Birds: food, nesting material, cover, Host for Green & Dotted Skippers, Bees	Blooms first year
<i>Bouteloua gracilis</i>	Blue Grama	3500-10,000'	Sun	Moderate-dry	Various textures, Well drained, Alkaline	Bunchgrass where hot/dry; Sod when cooler, moister; Foliage basal	6-20" x 12-24"	Pale green to blond tan	Fine; Eyelash seed heads	April-mid May, light cover over seeds	Birds, Butterflies, Skipper host	As turf, requires deep watering every 14-21 days; can mow a few times to 4"
<i>Buchloe dactyloides</i>	Buffalo Grass	3200-5200'	Sun	Moderate-dry	Various (not sand), Well drained	Rhizomatous groundcover	4-8" x infinity	Gray-blue green to tan when dormant	Fine; Curly leaves	mid March-mid May	Birds, Butterflies, Green Skipper host	Low traffic turf
<i>Muhlenbergia mexicana</i>	Mexican Muhly	4500-6500'	Sun-open shade	High-moderate	Loam	Erect, Rhizomatous, Leafy	2' x infinity	Bright green	Bushy, Fine leaves	April 1-15, light	Birds	Purplish inflorescence
<i>Muhlenbergia montana</i>	Mountain Muhly	5500-10,500'	Sun-part shade	Dry	Sandy, Loamy	Erect bunchgrass, Basal leaves	.5-2' x 1'	Pale green	Tufted, Floriferous from the base	April 1-15, light	Forage, Shelter	
<i>Panicum virgatum</i>	Switchgrass	3400-8000'	Sun	High-moderate	Sand-Clay, Well drained	Erect bunchgrass, Rhizomatous	4-5' x 2'	Green-blue green	Large open inflorescence	April 1-15, needs big temperature fluctuations day to night	Habitat for ground nesting birds & small mammals	Ecotype matters: can come from dry or moist area
<i>Schizachyrium scoparium</i>	Little Bluestem	3400-9500'	Sun	Moderate-dry	Sand-Clay, Well-drained	Erect columnar bunchgrass	1-3' x 1'	Blue green to russet in fall	Fine, Small fluffy white seed heads	May or when high temps are 70-80°	Birds: seeds and nesting material, Bees, Skipper host	May need supplemental water during growing season for 2 years; self-seeds
<i>Sorghastrum nutans</i>	Yellow Indiangrass	3500-6800'	Sun	Moderate-dry	Loam	Erect bunchgrass	4-6' x 1-1.5'	Pale-medium green	Large open airy panicle, 16" tall leaf tussocks	mid April-mid May, highs of 70-90°, wide temperature fluctuations aid germination	Birds: seeds and nesting material, Bees, Skipper host	Can flop if soil is too rich &/ moist
<i>Sporobolus airoides</i>	Alkali Sacaton	3400-8000'; (2400-7000' in other states)	Sun	Moderate	Clay-silty loam, Alkaline	Erect bunchgrass	3' x 1-2'	Pale green to blond in fall	Large open airy panicle	mid April-mid May, highs of 70-90°, 1/16" cover, wide temperature fluctuations	Birds: seeds & cover, Bees, Skipper host, Forage	Rain garden
<i>Sporobolus giganteus</i>	Giant Dropseed	3700-6000'	Sun	Dry	Sandy, Sandy loam, Well drained	Tall bunchgrass	4-6' x 2'	Medium green	Basal leaves; Dense spikelike panicle	mid April-mid May, highs of 70-90°, cover seeds 1/8"	Birds, Bees	
<i>Sporobolus heterolepis</i>	Prairie Dropseed	5000-7500'	Sun-partial open shade	Moderate-dry	Sandy, Loam	Hummocks	2-3' x 2-3'	Lime green to apricot gold in fall	Fine fountain of basal leaves; Floating froth of panicles	mid April through May, highs of 70-80°, 1/16" cover, wide temperature fluctuations	Birds	Attractive year round; rain garden
Prepared by Wild Ones Front Range Chapter Board Member and Programs Chair Jan Midgely, Spring 2021												