

FRONT RANGE REPORT

March 2019 Edition



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**Glorious Grasses
Native to Colorado's Front Range**

By Deborah Lebow Aal

No, no, not Kentucky Blue Grass! Banish that thought and that grass – definitely not native, here. Kentucky Blue Grass (referred to from now on as KBG !!), the bane of water providers in the west, is ubiquitous, and, while it serves a purpose (it really has very few plant rivals for large areas you want to walk on), there are so many native grasses that are water thrifty, beautiful, and low maintenance, it boggles the mind that KBG is still so dang popular. As you know, wherever we have KBG, we have an ecological dead zone – it does nothing for our pollinators and birds. I recently heard Nick Daniel, horticulturist at Denver Botanic Gardens, speak at the 4th annual Landscaping with Colorado Native Plants conference, here in Denver. He spoke eloquently (and comedically!) on native grasses, and highlighted just a few of the many native grasses that should be tried in our Front Range landscapes. Here are the grasses Nick highlighted:

Buffalo Grass (*Buchloe dactyloides*): This is the native rival to KBG. It is a warm season grass, so it goes dormant in the cold weather (KBG is a cool season grass). Buffalo grass requires us to change what we view as a beautiful lawn. It bunches a bit, and is brown at least 6 months of the year on the Front Range. But brown is the new green! This is not a tall landscape show-stopper. This is a lawn grass. Nick claims it can be used as a border in flower beds, to frame taller perennials, instead of mulch. I'd love to see that more in practice.



Buchloe dactyloides (Buffalo Grass)
Sedona Airport Mesa
by Max Licher



Idaho Fescue (*Festuca idahoensis*)
Deer Creek Center - Selma, Oregon
by Keir Morse

Idaho Fescue (*Festuca idahoensis*): This is a cool season grass. This grass requires medium water, so more water than others Nick highlighted, but not nearly as much as KBG, and it is beautiful. It gets 1-3 feet tall, depending on how much water it gets. As with all these grasses, they require some water to become established – the first two years, but then they look better with minimal water. If you overwater, they flop and droop. Nick likes the 'Siskyyou Blue' variety.

Prairie Dropseed: (*Sporobolus heterlepis*): This is a medium to low water grass. It can be used in single clumps, as a border, or massed, so quite versatile. It gets 2-4 feet high, again depending on

watering. A warm season grass.

And, by the way, all these grasses need to be cut down before they start greening up again in the spring. Don't cut them back right after they've gone dormant (brown). Leave them up at least through February (I cut mine back mid-March) both for winter interest and for wildlife – food and shelter.

Alkali sacaton (*Sporobolus airoides*): A medium to low water user, it does seed around a little, which means you have to pay a bit more attention. I find it easy to take grasses out where I don't want them and put them where I do want, if I get to them early enough. This one grows 3-4 feet tall and 2 feet wide, and the birds love it. It is extremely tough and long lived. A warm season grass.



Sporobolus airoides
by Sheryl Goodrich

Purple threeawn (*Aristida purpurea*): This one is short lived, but have no fear. It seeds around aggressively, so you'll always have new grasses to plant. It grows usually about a foot tall, although with overwatering can get up to 3 feet tall. Best suited for xeric and rocky gardens. A warm season grass.



Aristida purpurea
by Tony Frates

Big Bluestem (*Andropogon gerardii*): A low water user, it can get from 3 to 8 (!) feet tall. Nick recommends keeping this one dry so it doesn't get that tall and doesn't flop. There is a wide variety of color and height. Nick's favorite variety is 'Red October.' Warm Season.

Little Bluestem (*Schizachyrium scoparium*): Low to very low water needs. This one seeds around a bit and has extensive roots that can go 5-8 feet deep. Nick recommends 'Blue Heaven' and 'Blaze.' A warm season grass.

Despite the similarity in English names, this grass is not related to Big Bluestem.

Switchgrass (*Panicum virgatum*): I have this one all over my garden. It's a warm season grass with medium to low water requirements, gorgeous fall color and many, many varieties. I love the 'Shenandoah.' Nick recommends that one as well as 'Dallas Blues' and 'Heavy Metal.'



Foxtail barley (*Hordeum jubatum*): A cool season grass! This one is short-lived but very showy and very drought-tolerant. It likes full sun – most grasses do, and seeds aggressively, so deadheading is strongly advised. Foxtail barley looks best planted in swathes in meadow-type gardens. It grows from one to 3 feet tall, depending on water.

Sideoats grama (*Bouteloua curtipendula*): A warm season grass, requiring low to NO water. Wow. That's what we need (but remember, all plants need water to get established...). It's the largest of the grammas, and seems to be getting Front Range cred. It gets from one to 3 feet tall, and is not aggressive.



Sideoats grama (Bouteloua curtipendula)
©2018 Plant Network. 2018. <http://networkcity.org/network.php>. Accessed on March 01.

These are all perennial, meaning they will come back for several to many years. Often, after a few years or too much water, they become brown and appear dead in the middle of the clump. That signals it is time to divide the grass, and get five grasses or more out of the original. Nice...

So, banish the KBG, and maybe banish the ubiquitous Karl Foerster grass as well. Okay, it is beautiful, but it has been used absolutely everywhere and is not native to the Front Range. Nick was not shy about saying enough already with the Karl's.

If you'd like to know more about why you should take out or reduce your KBG, here's a link to my article on lawns from xxxxx 2018. And, Thank you, Nick!

Please comment! I love comments. Do you have grasses you love not mentioned here?
Email me at drlebow@gmail.com.

Become a Member

Why should you become a member of Wild Ones, and specifically, our local chapter, Front Range Wild Ones?

As a member, you are supporting an important movement, a movement to change how we landscape on the Front Range, to incorporate more native plants and bring more wildlife into our yards. The more members we have the louder our voice can be.

We have a niche that is special!! We provide hands-on information for homeowners who wish to bring more natives into their landscapes, not only showing you how to do it but also connecting you to professionals in the field that can help you achieve the native landscape of your dreams.

As a member, you will receive our chapter newsletter, as well as the Wild Ones Journal, and access to past Wild Ones Journals. You will be privy to our events before the general public is notified and receive member only discounts on specific events throughout the year.

For a steal of just \$40 a year, you can become a Wild member, gain access to our great member benefits, and do your part to re-wild the Front Range one yard at a time!!!

If you prefer, you can also join online by [CLICKING HERE](#) to fill out the online membership form and pay by Credit Card. There is a small service charge applied to online credit card transactions. The link above will also take you to a printable application. If this is your preference, please print out the membership form and return it with your check made payable to Wild Ones Membership to: 2285 Butte des Morts Beach Road, Neenah, WI, 54956-1008.

Please be sure to note Front Range as your Chapter in both the mail in and online forms.

UPCOMING EVENTS

- 7 March 2019: Kenton Seth – Working with Natives in the Name of Wildlife
- May 2019: Yard Tour
- June 2019: Talk on designing with natives
- September 2019: Yard Tour
- October 2019: Seed swap

Meet the Front Range Chapter Board

PRESIDENT - Emily Seddon



Emily is a recent Master of Science graduate in Ecology and Evolutionary Biology and currently located in Boulder, Colorado. She is involved with Wild Ones because she is passionate about botany and conserving natural and native ecosystems. Her background includes experience managing and assisting with projects detailing: environmental quality control; the ecological impacts of invasive species, flood damage, and soil erosion on ecosystem functioning; and conservation and restoration. She is a curious spirit, fascinated by nature and the great outdoors,

and prefers to be in the mountains observing wildlife and studying plants as much as possible.

VICE PRESIDENT - Deborah Lebow Aal



Deborah was born and raised in New York, but left as soon as she could, raising her children in the Washington DC area, and then moving to Colorado in 1998. Deborah worked for the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency as an attorney and then as a manager for 32 years, both in Washington, DC and in Denver, CO. She was involved in many different EPA offices and is well versed in issues related to water quality, air quality, and sustainability. Deborah also worked as program director for the Renewable Natural Resources Foundation for two years in the 1990's. Since leaving EPA, Deborah has studied and practiced permaculture and sustainable gardening, and has a deep passion for healing the earth one yard at a time. She is an avid hiker, cyclist and yogini.

SECRETARY - Lisa Rountree



Lisa was formerly an environmental science and biology professor at Pennsylvania Highlands Community College. In 2008, Lisa moved to Oklahoma City where she completed a Master Gardener program, and joined the Oklahoma Native Plant Society. After moving to Colorado in 2012, Lisa joined the Colorado Native Plant Society, and entered the Native Plant Master Program. Lisa is focused on using native plants to create front yard habitats that sustain indigenous insects and foster natural biodiversity.

TREASURER - Linda M. Hellow



Linda has served on Front Range Wild Ones Board in various capacities for the past 6 years. She began converting her bluegrass lawn to native prairie more than 15 years ago. Because there are always new plants to acquire and discover, she considers her yard a creative work-in-progress. She has completed the Native Plant Master program and the Landscape for Life Sustainable Landscaping Course.

ADVISOR - Douglas Beri Jr.



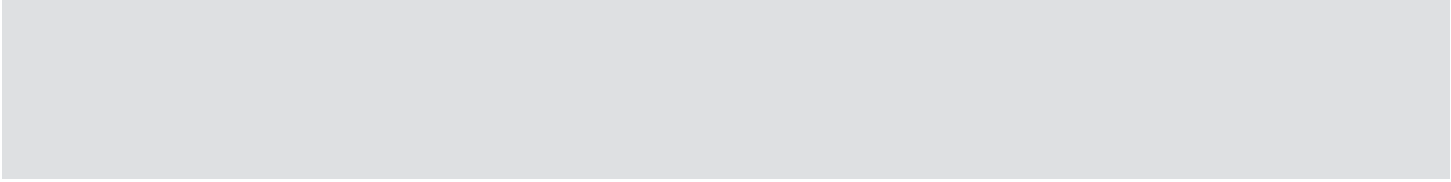
Doug is an avid outdoorsman who spends his free time volunteering, gardening, hiking, biking, white water rafting, kayaking and sky diving!!! Doug is a Program Director for Nature Abounds, a national non-profit focused on climate change research and biodiversity related issues including invasive plants and habitat restoration. Doug is a Pennsylvania native and has over 12 years of experience in restoring natural landscapes and non-profit management.



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