

# GRASSES

Native grasses come in all sizes and forms, from turf to five-foot tall specimens. The native lawn grasses, Buffalograss and Blue Grama, need little fertilizer, are relatively free of disease and insect damage, and use one-fourth the water bluegrass requires.

All the grasses excel at holding soil and preventing erosion. The colorful leaves of ornamental grasses add interest to the garden during the fall and winter when many other plants are dormant. When planted in open areas, the long narrow leaves move gracefully in the breeze, and the fluffy seed heads shine in backlight. Grasses are pollinated by the wind. The dry leaves of ornamental grasses may be cut back in early spring before new growth begins. For a more natural style do not cut back the dry leaves in the spring. The new green leaves will grow up through the dry, grey leaves of the previous winter, providing shelter the year-a-around for small wildlife. Small birds eat the grass seeds.

## Lawn Grasses



### **Blue Grama**

Grass family

*Bouteloua gracilis*

**Host plant** This grass is the principle food for many Skipper species of caterpillar, i.e., Rhesus, Uncas, Orange and Simius Roadside Skippers.

**Size** 12" High x 6" Wide

**Water** Low

**Exposure** Full sun

**Areas** All

A light and airy meadow effect results when Blue Grama is allowed to grow naturally and form seed stalks. Mow Blue Grama meadows in winter after the seed heads have dried. For a thick lawn, mow Blue Grama four inches high monthly during the growing season. Water deeply every seven to ten days during the summer. The soft finely textured leaves fade to light tan as they go dormant. Blue Grama is available as seed and plugs. Seed must be sown during hot weather to give the young grass time to establish itself before winter.



### **Buffalograss**

Grass family

*Buchloe dactyloides*

- Size 4-6" High x 12" Wide
- Water Low to medium
- Exposure Sun
- Areas All

Fine-leaved Buffalograss can be used alone in a lawn or meadow or mixed with Blue Grama. Blue Grama germinates sooner than Buffalograss, but Buffalograss fills in bare areas by extending above-ground runners. The soft light green leaves fade to buff in winter. Buffalograss is available as seed, plugs or sod. Seed must be sown during the summer months for the grass to be established by winter. Buffalograss is so low growing that it does not require mowing. But, if you wish, it can be mowed a few times a year for a "tidy" appearance.

## Ornamental Grasses



### **Cane Bluestem**

Grass family

*Bothriochloa barbinodis*

- Size 2-3' High x 2' Wide
- Water Low
- Exposure Full sun
- Areas All

Cane Bluestem gives new life to the garden in late summer. Fluffy white seed heads shimmer in the moonlight above the foliage and persist until spring. In fall, the leaves change from green to rosy pink. Over-watering will cause long floppy stems. Cut back in late winter. Silver Bluestem (*Bothriochloa laguroides*) is very similar, but may not tolerate elevations over 6500 feet.



### Sideoats Grama

Grass family

*Bouteloua curtipendula*

Size 2' High x 1' Wide

Water Medium

Exposure Full sun to part shade

Areas All

A meadow effect is achieved by the round clumps of Sideoats Grama. The coarse vertical leaf blades are blue-green in spring and straw-color in fall. Sideoats Grama flowers from July through September. The long seeds hang in rows like pennants on one side of the stiff flowering stalks. Deep-water twice a month in summer. Cut back to six or eight inches in late winter.



### Sand Lovegrass

Grass family

*Eragrostis trichodes*

Size 2' High x 1' Wide

Water Medium

Exposure Full sun to part shade

Areas All

In August, Sand Lovegrass produces large airy red seed heads that rise like a rosy cloud a foot above the leaves. The seed heads will remain attractive nearly all winter and can be cut for dried arrangements. Despite its name, Sand Lovegrass will grow in most soils. While it is stunning in the late summer landscape, Sand Lovegrass reseeds too profusely to use in tidy flowerbeds. Deep water twice monthly in drier areas. Cut back to three inches in late winter.



### **Bush Muhly**

Grass family

*Muhlenbergia porteri*

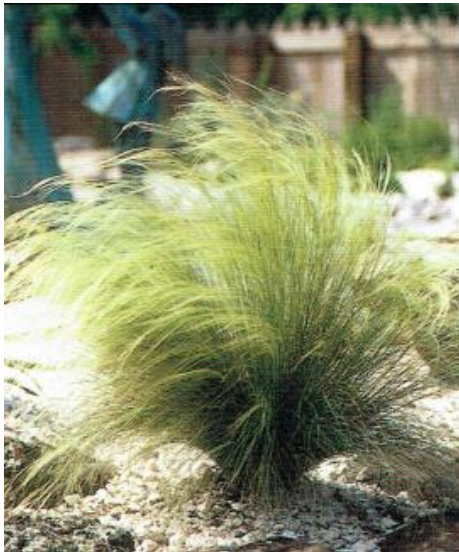
Size 1' High x 3' Wide

Water Low

Exposure Full sun

Areas Heights, Valley, West Mesa

Bush Muhly forms a low bushy mound of dense intricately entwined stems covered in pale green leaves. In late summer, fluffy pink-purple seed heads transform the clump into a cotton candy cloud. Bush Muhly can be used in meadow plantings or massed in open areas. Not only is this grass bushy, it tends to grow up through bushes, protecting itself from grazers. Deep-water once a month. Cut back to six inches at the end of winter.



### **Thread Grass**

Grass family

*Nassella tenuissima*

Size 2' High x 2' wide

Water Low

Exposure Full sun or part shade

Areas All

The arching form of this cool season bunchgrass is attractive year round. However, Thread Grass is breathtaking in May when its fine leaves are topped by even finer seed heads that flow and drift in the breeze. In fall and winter, it fades to a buff color retaining threads of green. Thread Grass has a tendency to reseed. Cut back in early spring.



### **Indian Ricegrass**

Grass family

*Oryzopsis hymenoides*

Size 12" high x 18" Wide

Water Low

Exposure Full sun

Areas West Mesa

Indian Ricegrass might accent a rock garden or border, or it may be used in a meadow where its light lacy flower heads contrast with surrounding plants. This cool season bunch grass blooms in spring. By early summer birds are attracted to and eat the large seeds. Indian Ricegrass is an indicator of sandy soil and is especially suited to the West Mesa area. Cut back to three inches in late winter.



### **Little Bluestem**

Grass family

*Schizachyrium scoparium*

Size 2' High x 1' Wide

Water Medium

Exposure Full sun

Areas All

Little Bluestem is a warm season bunchgrass. The leaves can be green or blue-green, picking up subtle shades of orange, pink and purple in late summer. As the season progresses and the flower stalks mature into cottony seed heads, the leaves turn pink-russet, keeping this color all winter. Little Bluestem reseeds too readily to plant in flowerbeds, but works well in meadows or as a visually striking ground cover. Deep-water two to four times a month in summer. Cut back dead foliage to six inches in late winter.



### **Indiangrass**

Grass family

*Sorghastrum nutans*

Size 2' High x 2' wide  
Water Low  
Exposure Full sun  
Areas All

For most of the year, Indiangrass masquerades as an ordinary coarse-bladed rhizomatous bunchgrass. In late summer, multiple flower stalks shoot up three to six feet. These terminate in spikes of fluffy golden seed heads that bend gracefully in the wind. The leaves become bronze-colored in the fall. During the growing season, water Indiangrass once a week if growing in sand or once a month in clay. Cut back to four inches in the winter.



### **Giant Sacaton**

Grass family

*Sporobolus wrightii*

Size 5' High x 4' Wide  
Water Low  
Exposure Full sun  
Areas Heights, Valley, West Mesa

Giant Sacaton adds a stunning accent to the garden. Although it is as large and stately as pampas grass, Giant Sacaton needs far less water. In summer, tall graceful flower heads push up through the arching leaves. In fall the feathery seed heads turn into gold. Deep-water twice a month in summer and monthly the rest of the year. Cut back to one foot late in winter.