

A Conservation Plant Released by the Natural Resources Conservation Service  
Cape May Plant Materials Center, Cape May, NJ

# Dune Crest Germplasm Coastal Little Bluestem

*Schizachyrium littorale* (Nash)  
Bickn.



Dune Crest Germplasm coastal little bluestem (*Schizachyrium littorale* (Nash) Bickn.) is source-identified germplasm released from the Cape May Plant Materials Center in Cape May, NJ in 2007. Photo by, USDA NRCS Plant Materials Center, Cape May, NJ.

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### Description

Coastal little bluestem is a short, native, 1–2 foot warm-season bunch grass with coarse blue–green stems and basal leaves which often appear purplish. Coastal little bluestem can be distinguished from inland little bluestem as the former has bent stems at its base, while the latter has erect stems. Leaves are smooth but frequently are covered with hair at the base next to the sheath. Leaves tend to fold with maturity. Seed head clusters are approximately 3 in long and consist of a number of short, silvery hairs (awns) when the seeds are ripe. These seed heads give the plant a frosted appearance in early fall. After frost, the entire plant has a reddish cast. The stems persist through winter and turn brownish tan.

### Source

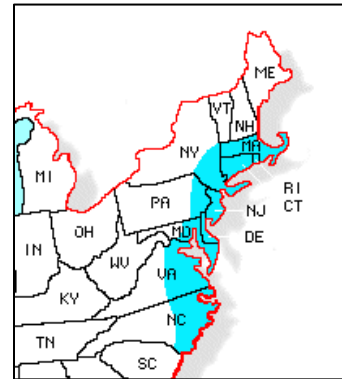
Dune Crest Germplasm is a composite release originating from 6 collection sites. These sites include: Sea Bright; Barnegat Light; Brigantine; Avalon; and Cape May in New Jersey; and Delaware State Park near Dewey Beach in Delaware.

### Conservation Uses

Coastal little bluestem is useful for adding plant diversity to frontal back dune and secondary dune systems. It is especially well-suited for stabilizing back dune “blow-out” areas. It also provides cover for ground birds and small mammals. It is tolerant of hot, dry, nutrient-poor soils and would make an excellent choice for “low-input” sustainable landscape planting.

### Area of Adaptation and Use

Coastal little bluestem occurs almost exclusively along the coastal strip from southern New England to Texas. Dune Crest Germplasm was developed for use in the Northeast to Mid-Atlantic coasts from Massachusetts south to North Carolina specifically.



Map of Dune Crest Germplasm coastal little bluestem area of adaption and recommended area of use.

### Establishment and Management for Conservation Plantings

Seeding methods for this species have not been developed for back dune stabilization. Chopping stems with mature seed attached into the sand may result in some natural recruitment. However, the most reliable method of establishment is planting plugs of this species on 2–3 foot spacing between rows of American beachgrass (*Ammophila breviligulata*). One bare-root or potted plant should be planted 2 inches below the nursery container depth. The stem should be a 12–24 inches tall.

Apply fertilizer in accordance with soil test recommendations from the local county extension service. If the soils lab does not maintain recommendations specifically for this species, they may use guidelines for similar species such as little bluestem (*Schizachyrium scoparium*) or other native warm season grass.

### **Ecological Considerations**

There are no known ecological concerns regarding use of this plant.

### **Seed and Plant Production**

Seed can be collected very effectively using multiple passes with a flail-vac sweeper stripper. Seed had a 13% germination rate for the years 2010-2013, in Cape May, NJ.

### **Availability**

*For conservation use:* For sources of supply for Dune Crest Germplasm coastal little bluestem or for more information on the availability, planting and use, contact your local NRCS office or Soil and Water Conservation District

*For seed or plant increase:* Dune Crest Germplasm coastal little bluestem is an eastern US source-identified release. Foundation seed can be obtained from the Cape May Plant Materials Center for the purpose of large-scale increase.

*For more information, contact:*

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For additional information about this and other plants, please contact your local USDA Service Center, NRCS field office, or Conservation District <<http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/>>, and visit the PLANTS Web site <<http://plants.usda.gov>> or the Plant Materials Program Web site <http://www.plant-materials.nrcs.usda.gov>

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