

## HIGH-ALTITUDE NATIVE GRASSES (~7,500' to ~9,000')

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*Even with normal precipitation, trying to establish new grass under dryland conditions is tricky. Generally, the best time to seed is in the late fall, just before the first significant snowfall. The seeds will then germinate in the spring. The other time in Colorado for seeding is late June or early July, just before the monsoonal moisture flow that is typical that time of year. This can be very successful or can be a total bust, depending on whether the rains come in at the right amount and over a long enough period of time. Seeding grass with a drill is the most successful practice, but most small acreage landowners do not have access to a drill. Broadcast seeding can work, but is not as successful as drill seeding. For broadcasting, the seeding rate needs to be doubled and the seeds need to be incorporated into the soil by harrowing as best as possible.*

INDIAN RICE GRASS is a beautiful grass that was a prime food source of Native Americans who would grind the grain into flour to make bread. Both the leaves and grain have high nutritional value. Indian Rice Grass has been steadily destroyed in its native habitat since the 1800s; it is a grass worthy of restoration and preservation. The 1' to 2' flowering stems are beautifully airy and a graceful accent in rock gardens or flower beds, and it is a great grass for sandy soil/meadow reclamation. Often found in flower markets, many people grow it specifically for cutting. Birds love the seeds! Look for varieties called "Nezpar" or "Paloma."

MOUNTAIN BROME is a bunchgrass native to the Rocky Mountain and Pacific Coast regions. Plants grow to 4' with leaves up to 12" long and about ¼" wide. Leaf blades are flat and hairy underneath. Growth starts early in the spring, producing much leafy forage relished by livestock. Because of rapid seedling growth and a well-branched, deep root system, mountain brome is excellent where rapid cover development is needed.

BLUE GRAMA GRASS is a warm-season grass native to the High Plains, often referred to as "eyelash grass." It is a low-growing bunch grass, 1 to 1 ½' tall with the seed heads. It is part sod-forming and can be grown as a tight turf. The blades are thin, so the texture of this grass is very fine. Easy to establish, cold hardy, pest and disease free, tolerant of poor soil. The seed is borne in flags that curl back gracefully when dry. Up here, plant only in open, south or west facing areas.

BLUE WILD RYE is a perennial bunchgrass native throughout the western states. It grows in small tufts reaching up to 5'. Leaves are broad and flat, up to 12" long. It is abundant on moist soils, but will tolerate drought. It is shade tolerant. This slender wheatgrass grows to 3' tall in dense, leafy clumps or bunches a foot or more in diameter. The flowering stems are erect and rather coarse. Most of the leaves are basal and are up to a foot long and ½" wide. Propagation is by seeds. The seed has a high germination rate and excellent emergence characteristics. It can provide a good grass cover on areas that have been disturbed and may be used for seeding low areas that tend to be alkaline.

WHEATGRASS is a slender, relatively short-lived grass. It is not as competitive with weeds as other wheatgrasses, but it is shade-tolerant.

ARIZONA FESCUE grows in evergreen forests and meadows. Dense, thin stems 2-4' tall form this high-elevation bunchgrass.

JUNEGRASS flowers early and produces lustrous silvery-green seedheads in early summer. It grows on dry sandy and rocky soils, seldom exceeding 2' in height.

MOUNTAIN MUHLY is a dense-growing, moderately large bunchgrass that flowers after the soil has been moistened by summer rains. The plants are usually about 1 to 2' tall.

WESTERN WHEATGRASS is easy to establish on dryland sites. It is a cool-season, perennial, sod-forming grass. It reaches a height of 1 to 3', and because of its bluish-colored stems and leaves, it is often called Bluestem Wheatgrass. Western Wheatgrass will tolerate short periods of flooding and also endure long periods of drought.

LITTLE BLUESTEM is more typically thought of as a plains grass, however it is worth trying up here on south or west-facing areas. A small, non-spreading, clump-forming grass with blue-green leaves that turn bronze-red in the fall. Fluffy silver seedheads are ornamental throughout the winter.

**FOR MORE INFORMATION, PLEASE REFER TO:** [Native Grasses for Use in Colorado Landscapes](#)