



## Native Grasses Work for You

Whether you're preventing erosion, planting a beautiful native garden, attracting wildlife, or simply looking for unique plants, native grasses will add a new dimension to your landscape. Over the past two hundred years, foreign grazing practices, land disturbance, and introduced exotic plants have nearly eliminated native grass communities in California. Now you can help bring these plants back.

Native grasses are much different than typical lawn grasses or pasture grasses. Many of the grass species we see today are introduced, short perennials or Mediterranean annuals. These plants have shallow root systems. Native perennials have root systems that penetrate up to six feet deep. This translates to a twelve-fold increase in: carbon taken out of the atmosphere, soil development (including depth, water and nutrient content and holding capacity, microbial activity, and pollutant absorption), and soil holding ability. With a deep, probing root system, native perennials stay green nearly year-round without irrigation. This extended growing season means more food for wildlife and livestock, as well as more carbon sequestering. It's no wonder native, perennial grasses are gaining in popularity for erosion control.



Native grasses are beautiful plants; each species displays its own characteristics. Forms vary from fountain-like to upright. Some species have large seed tufts while others have narrow spikes. Many of these plants provided seeds as the staple diet of Native Californians. Knowledge about native grasses is often lacking, so finding several varieties that are native to your area can be a challenge. Finding seed or starts can be even more difficult. We've put this sheet together to save you the work.

### Proven Humboldt County Native Grasses (call for other counties)

*Bromus carinatus* (California Brome), *Deschampsia cespitosa* (Tufted Hairgrass), *Elymus glaucus* (Blue Wildrye)\*, *Festuca californica* (California Fescue), *Hordeum brachyantherum* (California Meadow Barley)\*, *Koeleria macrantha* (Junegrass), *Leymus triticoides* (Creeping Wildrye), *Nassella cernua* (Nodding Needlegrass)\*, *Nassella pulchra* (Purple Needlegrass). \* denotes rapid germination

### Seed, Plant, & Information Sources

Freshwater Farms @ 444-8261 or <http://www.freshwaterfarms.com>

Silver Falls Seed Company @ (503) 874-8221 or <http://www.silverfallsseed.com>

Larner Seeds @ (415) 868-9407 or [http://www.larnerseeds.com/pages/wildflower\\_annual.html](http://www.larnerseeds.com/pages/wildflower_annual.html)

Sam Polly @ Streamline Planning Consultants, (707) 822-5785 or [spolly@streamlineplanning.net](mailto:spolly@streamlineplanning.net)

### Informative Websites

USDA's article Restoring California's Native Grasses @

<http://www.ars.usda.gov/is/AR/archive/may04/grass0504.htm>

California Native Grass Association's *Grasslands Journal* article entitled Creating a Native Meadow:

<http://www.cnga.org/library/CreatingANativeCaliforniaMeadowAmme2003.pdf>

Notes on Planting and Maintenance of Bunchgrasses, found in *Fremontia* by CA Native Plant Society:

<http://www.cnga.org/library/NotesOnPlantingAndMaintBunchgrassesRogers1981.pdf>

USDA PLANTS Database (<http://plants.usda.gov/index.html>) provides species characteristics

Individual grass photos courtesy of Dale Darris, USDA NRCS Corvallis PMC and Oregon PMC, respectively.



North American Prairie.

# Native Humboldt County Grasses

The following grass species are the most readily available from seed companies, and have been grown successfully in the county. These profiles will give you an idea of what the species look like and where they are best suited to grow. All of these species are good for land restoration and erosion control. Generally, the more rapidly germinating species are the best for erosion control, except Junegrass, which is slow to establish. With the exception of California Fescue (thought to be poisonous) and Nodding Needlegrass (unknown), these grasses provided grain, which was parched and ground into flour by Native Americans.

## *Bromus carinatus*, California Brome

A 1.5 to 4 foot tall, short-lived perennial with an open base and coarse, erect to spreading stems. Handles **poorly drained soils**. Some seed is difficult to germinate.

## *Deschampsia cespitosa*, Tufted Hairgrass:

With attractive clumps 1 to 3 feet high, this grass is a **popular ornamental**. Tolerates **high pH** and **wet soils**. Germination is moderately slow.

## *Elymus glaucus*, Blue Wildrye

A large, upright bunchgrass growing to 5 feet tall. Seeds germinate rapidly. *E. glaucus* is **drought** tolerant.

## *Festuca californica*, California Fescue

Growing about 2 to 4.5 feet tall, this bunchgrass has a tightly clumped base with tall, erect stems. Moderately rapid germination. Another **popular landscape grass**. *F. californica* can handle **sandy soils and drought**.

## *Hordeum brachyantherum*, California Meadow Barley

Growth habit is an open tuft with erect to slightly spreading, smooth stalks that are about 1.3 to 3.5 feet tall. The flower head is a narrow, flattened spike growing 2 to 4 inches. These seeds germinate rapidly and make a nice **landscape plant**. This grass can handle **sandy, wet, and poor soils**, as well as moderately tolerating drought.

## *Koeleria macrantha*, Junegrass

A 0.5 to 2 foot tall tufted bunchgrass sporting attractive, 2 to 5 inch seed heads that are dense and tapered at both ends. Moderately rapid germination. Another good **landscape grass**. **Drought** tolerant.

## *Leymus triticoides*, Creeping Wildrye

A 2 to 4 foot tall grass with 8 inch, upright spikes. Moderately rapid germination. Displays an oriental effect. A good plant for **wet areas**.

## *Nassella cernua*, Nodding Needlegrass

A 2 foot tall, tufted bunchgrass. Rapid germination. This plant provides an attractive show of seed heads. This grass handles **sand, drought, and poor, infertile soils**.

## *Nassella pulchra*, Purple Needlegrass

State grass of California. This grass is similar to Nodding Needlegrass, with longer foliage. Germination is moderately rapid. **Drought** tolerant.

## California Native Grass (Humboldt Non-Native)

### *Achnatherum hymenoides*, Indian Rice Grass

A 1.5 foot tall grass with slender leaves growing from the base of the bunch. Three month moist refrigeration required to germinate. A **graceful, drought tolerant ornamental**.

### *Muhlenbergia rigens*, Deergrass

Up to 5 foot tall tufts make **attractive garden plant**. Used in landscaping state-wide.