



ARIZONA-SONORA DESERT MUSEUM

PLANT CARE INFORMATION



Native Grasses

Many species of native Arizona perennial grasses need little or no irrigation once established in Tucson. All are warm-season growers; the tops are often dead and brown from late fall until the summer rains. Most will green up as early as April if watered. Those found in wetter areas need more water, but may stay greener longer.

- Muhlenbergia dumosa*, Bamboo Muhly**, is a very large, graceful grass growing to 6' tall. Bamboo-like stems lend it a tropical look. It can be grown in sun or part shade. This grass is found in moist canyons, so supplemental water is needed.
- Muhlenbergia emersleyi*, Bull Grass**, is a medium to large grass with lacy flower spikes; often tinged in red. Found on shady slopes, this bunchgrass can take sun, too, but will need supplemental water.
- Muhlenbergia porteri*, Bush Muhly**, is an open bunch grass that makes a lacy globe of vegetation 2' tall and across. Delicate lavender inflorescences appear throughout the growing season.
- Muhlenbergia rigens*, Deerglass**, is a streamside grass with a bold, spiky form. It can take sun or shade, but will always need supplemental irrigation.
- Panicum bulbosum*, Bulb Panicgrass**, is a beautiful tufted perennial from oak woodlands. Tall, lacy inflorescences are tinged with red. Needs irrigation. Good for sun or shade.
- Pappophorum mucronulatum*, Spike Pappusgrass**, is a larger bunchgrass; quite upright with tall, narrow spikes. It makes a good full-sun substitute for fountain grass. Drought tolerant.
- Setaria* species, Bristlegrass**, is a robust perennial bunchgrass growing up to 3' tall, topped with spikes of large seed. Does best with occasional watering. Takes full sun to moderate shade.
- Sporobolus airoides*, Alkali Sacaton**, is a large bunchgrass usually 3' to 4' tall with wispy spikes. This species needs somewhat more water than the others on this list.
- Sporobolus wrightii*, Sacaton**, is a giant grass to 6' or more tall, with wispy spikes. This species grows in low spots that are fairly wet in summer, and should be kept moist in warm months. Its roots are very deep, 6' or more if the soil is that deep.
- Tridens muticus*, Slim Tridens**, is a small to medium-size bunchgrass found on rocky slopes. Tight flower spikes add to the compact look of this drought tolerant grass.

CULTURE: Most of our grasses need full sun to do well. Most will perform best in heavy, clay-rich soil; they will need more water in well-drained soils. Sow seeds onto loosened soil in warm weather; barely cover by raking lightly and keep surface moist until seeds have germinated. It is easier to accomplish during humid monsoon season. Transplant container-grown plants at the same depth as they were in the pot. Water both seedlings and transplants generously and deeply through the first summer to establish a deep root system which may go down three feet or more. Also protect from rabbits and other wildlife until growing vigorously.

Once established (in heavy soil) many can survive on rainfall plus occasional summer irrigation except as noted. More water results in larger plants. The dead stems from previous years are persistent and tend to shade out new growth. Cut them to the ground at least every two years to rejuvenate them.

"Dew" on leaves in the morning is actually natural leakage from within the leaf. Butterflies find this an irresistible source of moisture and minerals.