

NEEDLEANDTHREAD NEEDLEGRASS

Stipa comata



ORIGIN AND DESCRIPTION

Native, widely distributed over the Western U.S. and Great Plains. Erect, leafy, cool-season, long-lived, perennial bunchgrass. Culms 1 to 3' tall with glossy bright green basal leaves 4 to 12" long. Open panicle head 5 to 10" long with a bent, twisted awn about 4 to 8" long. Extensive deep fibrous root system.

GROWTH HABITS AND ENVIRONMENTAL PREFERENCES

Common on dry, sandy, or gravelly plains, mesas, and foothills, and sometimes even into

the mountains 4,000 to 8,500' elevation. Common in sagebrush, juniper-pinyon and ponderosa pine, also on semi desert, and foothills of the Southwest. Grows on shallow soils with 10 to 16" ppt. Starts growth in March and makes most of its vegetative growth by May and matures in June and July. Makes regrowth all summer if moisture is adequate. It has good drought resistance.

CULTURE

Drill seed at 1/2" deep on loam and clay loam soils, slightly deeper on sandy soils. Plant 7 to 14 lbs. PLS per acre. Plant seed in the fall, dormant or very early in the spring before loss of soil moisture. Weeds need to be controlled, especially in first 30 to 60 days of growth. Do not graze the first season, new plantings should not be grazed until well established. Plants should be managed to reach seed maturity every 3 to 4 years to regenerate.

USE AND MANAGEMENT

Used for range forage, hay, and land stabilization. Adapted to light textured soils and used for conservation of erosive sandy soils. Plan grazing with two months rest every other year, if possible; where warm season grasses are nearby, plan to use them in rotation. Moderately palatable to cattle, more so when green and very early in season after seeds drop. Sharp pointed seeds with barbed awns may cause physical injury, especially to sheep. Palatability and forage value may vary by region and season and with varied plant associations. Palatable species, can be killed out by overgrazing. Cures rather well and is often utilized in the winter.

IMPROVED VARIETIES

None listed for region.

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