

Rattlesnake Grass

(*Bromus brizaeformis*)

Where does it grow? It is found mainly in eastern Oregon. Usually grows out in the open where it can get lots of sunshine. Favorite growing places are on open hillsides, rocky cliffs (when it can get a toe hold), in open meadows near Ponderosa pine trees, and in dry creek bottoms. You will find this grass mostly at elevations of 2,000 to 4,000 feet. Watch for it growing with grasses like Idaho fescue, bluebunch wheatgrass, sandberg bluegrass, and prairie Junegrass. Samples of this grass have been collected from near The Dalles in Wasco County to the high desert country near Paisley in Lake County. It seems to like the fringe along the Blue Mountains.

Is it important? It furnishes a little bit of stock feed early in the spring, but not much. When good ranges start going bad, you will find this grass increasing. It will increase on poor range because it gets ripe in July and livestock don't like to eat it then. Some people grow this grass as an ornamental, as you might grow cactus, desert flowers, or wild roses.

What does it look like? The grain-bearing spikelets grow on the very tip of each branchlet. They look like the rattles on a rattlesnake's tail. When the grain is ripe and you shake the plant, it makes a sound like an upset rattler. For this reason it is called "rattlesnake grass." It usually grows about a foot high.

Look closely and you will see that most of the leaves are on the lower part of the stem. The stems and leaves are covered with tiny soft silver hairs. When the plant is green, the joints (nodes) on the stem are dark brown and the base of the spikelets is a reddish purple color.

When the plant gets ripe, the stems turn dark red; the grain gets heavy; and the branches droop or hang down mostly toward one side of the plant. Looks something like tiny decorations on a Christmas tree.



Rattlesnake grass is an annual of little importance except as a curiosity. The heads rattle when ripe (1 x).



Spikelet
(2 x).



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Description:

Length of life -- Annual.

Height -- Usually about a foot.

Bunch or sod -- Bunch.

Growth period -- Starts growing in the spring and dies by the middle of July.

How does it spread -- By seeds. Seeds are moved by water, wind, animals, and birds.

Leaf shape -- Short, narrow, and pointed. Veins easily seen.

Leaf location -- Near the base of the stems. Few tiny ones up higher.

Shape and size of grain -- About a quarter of an inch long. Covered with a thin papery tan covering like bat wings. Flat grain is red when mature.

Other names: Rattlesnake Chess, Rattlesnake Brome.

Does it look like anything else? Once you learn to identify bromegrasses, you know right off that this is a bromegrass. All the wild bromes have beards (awns). The awns on this grass, however, are real short and appear only on the tips of the spikelets. The stems, leaves, and seed heads are covered with soft, silvery hairs.