

Bulbous Bluegrass

(Poa bulbosa)

Where does it grow? Bulbous bluegrass grows just about every place in Oregon where it is planted, except highly alkaline and swampy sites. It grows wherever cheatgrass will grow. The grass is found along roadsides, about farmsteads, on range land and in pastures wherever it has been seeded. It grows best in hot, dry elevations, where it can grow in the winter, such as near the Columbia and Snake Rivers and in Jackson County.

Is it important? It is one of the earliest grasses. Where it occurs with cheat, bulbous bluegrass will be twice as tall in early spring. It makes a bright light green cover compared to the pale washed-out appearance of cheat. It starts growth either in fall or spring where it gets moisture and suitable temperatures. Bulbous bluegrass was introduced from Europe. It is one of the most drought resistant plants in Oregon, and the seeds -- which are not true seeds but bulblets -- provide considerable nourishment. The bulblets contain some fat and are relished by animals, including rodents and birds.

In Lake County, sheep have been seen in early winter pawing over a small area on dry, overused range. On examination the sheep were found to be pawing out and eating the bulbs of this grass.

Disadvantages are that: Its grazing period in the spring is short. It does not have an extensive root system as do other perennial grasses. It is not effective in controlling erosion. Generally by July and August top growth of the plant has largely disappeared. The leaves and stems tend to dry up and blow away. So even where there is a good stand it may be hard to find in August.

What does it look like? Bulbous bluegrass in thick stand has a bright, buoyant, light green appearance in the spring. It is not so dark green as Kentucky bluegrass, nor does it have the yellowish-green or reddish tinge of cheatgrass. Blades are densely tufted and more or less bulbous at the base. The "seed" produced are bulblets that are dark purple, particularly at the base. The grass head or panicle looks like the tail of an unbobbed Airedale dog.

Fields of a mature stand of bulbous bluegrass have a dark purplish cast when mature.

Does it look like anything else? Bulbous bluegrass looks somewhat like Kentucky bluegrass, but the leaves are lighter green and narrower than the latter. Ends of the leaves are not so distinctly boat shaped as Kentucky bluegrass but are not so sharp pointed as the fescues.

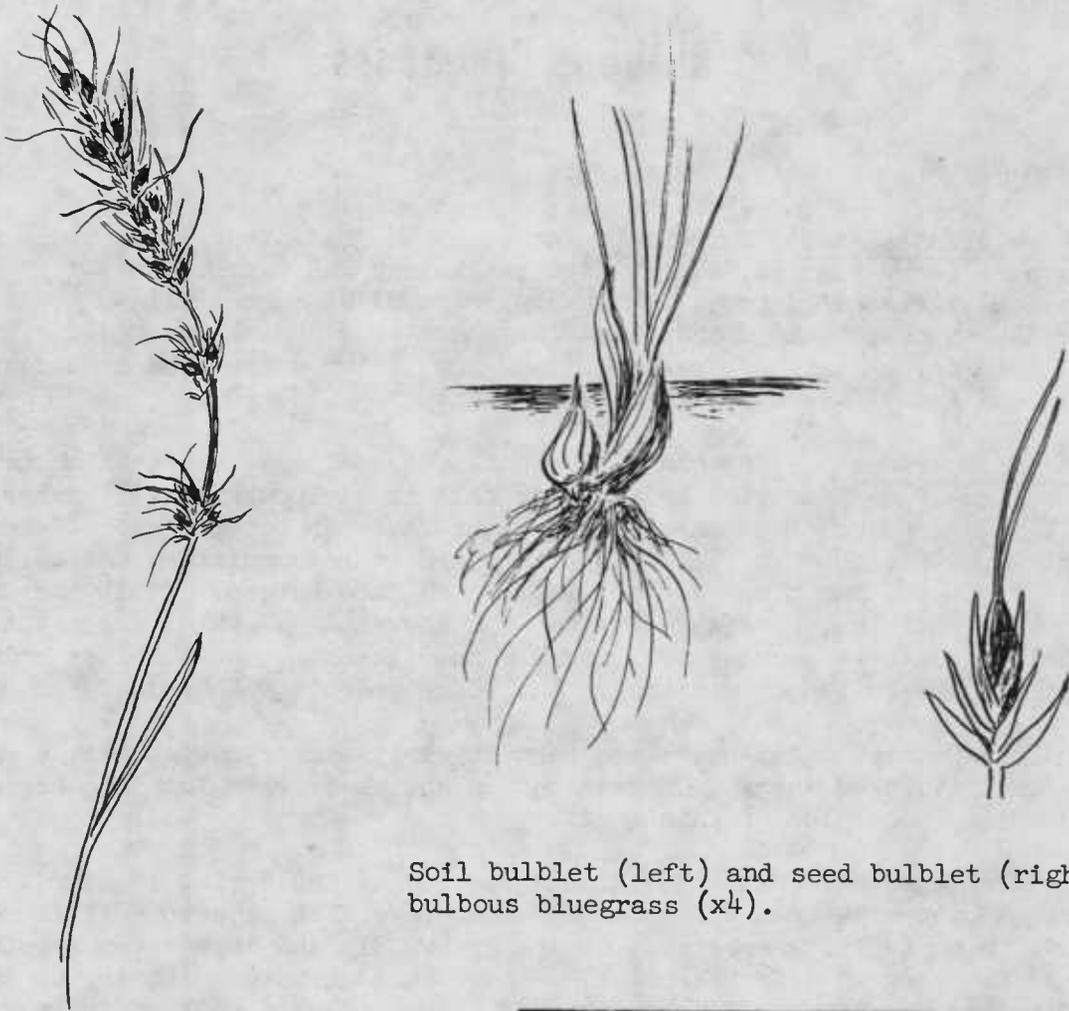
The heads of the grass droop over when near maturity and heavy with their load of dark purplish bulblets.

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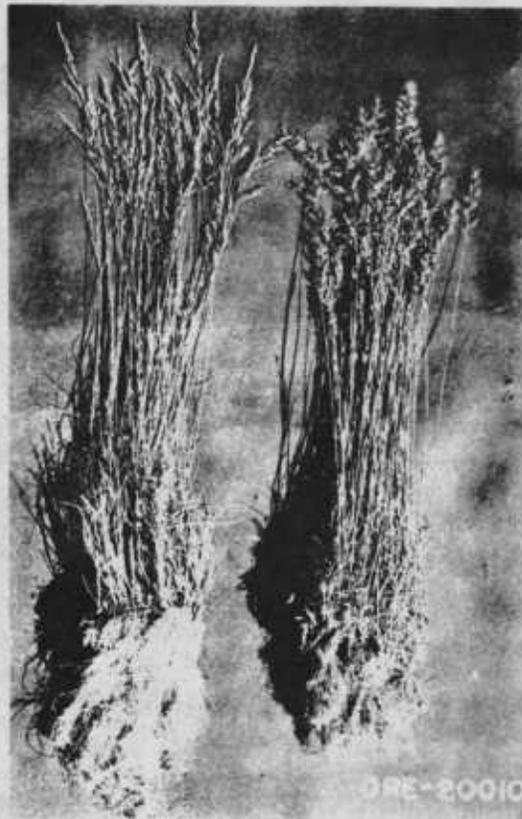
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Soil bulblet (left) and seed bulblet (right) of bulbous bluegrass (x4).

Bulbous bluegrass is about a foot high, has bulblets underground, and bears other bulblets in place of seed (x1).

Bulbous bluegrass (right) has a much smaller root system than the common little bluegrass (left). The roots of bulbous blue die each year, as is the case with other bulbs, such as daffodil and tulip.



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