

Junegrass

(Koeleria cristata)

Where does it grow? Junegrass is a perennial bunchgrass found in sagebrush range in every eastern Oregon county. It is one of the most widely distributed of western grasses, and extends from high to low and from dry to moist soils. It rarely forms pure stands -- just one of the company -- but increases under slight overgrazing as the better grasses begin to drop out.

Is it important? Junegrass is fairly good forage, relished early in the season by all classes of livestock. It matures and becomes tough and unpalatable earlier than some of the other grasses, such as bluebunch wheatgrass. This grass produces an abundance of leaves but they are relatively short and basal, so the species does not yield a large amount of forage per plant. It is one of the grasses that can increase rapidly when the range is given a chance to improve. For instance, after spraying to control sagebrush, only squirreltail and bluegrasses have increased as quickly as Junegrass.

What does it look like? It is a medium sized bunchgrass, generally forming clumps about 3 or 4 inches across. The leaves are dense, short, and basal. The stems are stiff, erect, and about a foot high. The heads (panicles) are narrow and rounded because of fairly dense flowering (general appearance somewhat like timothy heads), later becoming more open and bushy. Junegrass produces an abundance of seed that is rather low in germination. The plant begins growth early and matures early, which probably explains why it is able to withstand considerable close grazing. It looks somewhat like some species of bluegrass, but the leaves usually are flat, not folded like bluegrasses, and fine hairs are on the stalks just below the heads, while bluegrasses are free of these hairs.

Description:

Length of life -- Perennial.

Height -- About a foot.

Bunch or sod -- Bunch.

Growth period -- April, May, and June. Dries up in July.

How does it spread? -- Seed. The grains are small and are easily moved short distances by wind.

Shape of leaves -- Flat, fairly narrow, sharp pointed, and rather short.

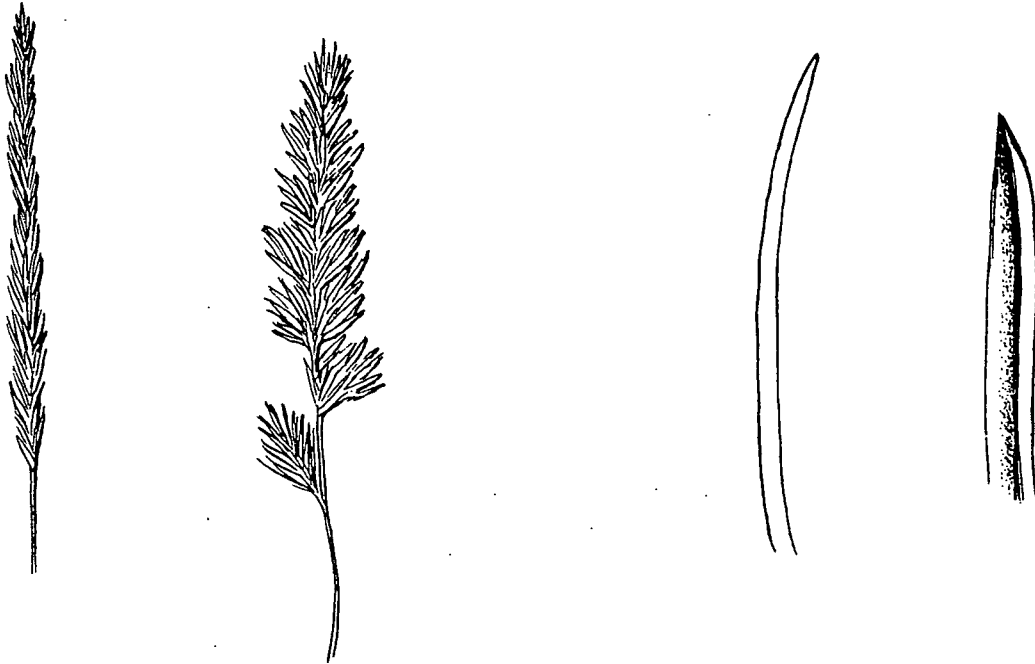
Location of leaves -- Mostly basal and fairly dense there. Some short blades on the stems.

Size and shape of grain -- Less than 1/4 inch long, without beards or awns.

Other names -- Mountain Junegrass, Prarie Junegrass, and Koeleria.

How to use it -- Moderate grazing spring and summer.

Does it look like anything else? Not too much; this is the only local species of Koeleria, and can be told from the bluegrasses because the spikelets are crowded, giving the heads a compact appearance. So if immature heads are compact, and the mature heads are bushy, it's probably Junegrass.



Junegrass is a good perennial on most of Oregon's sagebrush range. The heads become bushy when ripe (xl).

Junegrass leaves are flat and short for their width; bluegrass leaves have tips like the end of a canoe (xl).