Indian Ricegrass
(Oryzopsis hymenoides)

Where does it grow? From the sandy blow soils along the Columbia to the pumice and sand of Central Oregon. The seeds will grow through more soil than most grasses, hence it can establish itself on blow soils. It likes open, sunny, hot soils, but not shade. It will grow on slightly alkaline soils.

Is it important? It is an excellent forage plant, but is seldom thick enough to make up a high percentage of the feed. But it can establish itself on shifting sand, so often comes into abandoned harvested fields or burned-over or overgrazed areas in sandy locations. It is good feed spring, summer, or winter. The grain hangs on after it ripens and makes splendid feed in the fall. Indians used the grain ("seeds"), as the name implies, as rice is used—for food. They boiled or ground it, mixed it with meat, and fried it, much as we make potatoe patties or hamburgers.

What does it look like? Indian ricegrass grows in a compact tuft with many leaves at the base. Leaves are long and slim, even up to a foot long. Stems are not much longer than leaves. Flower clusters are branched and rebranched, with a single flower at the tip of each branchlet. The branchlets are threadlike, wavy, and grow crazily in every direction so that the plant in flower or seed has a lacy appearance. Foliage, when mature, is very light colored, so the whitish clumps are rather conspicuous in the fall.

Indian ricegrass has a distinct lacy-white appearance when mature and grows on sandy blow soil (1/2 x).

Grain of ricegrass is hard and shiny with a short awn that breaks off at maturity (5 x).
The seedlings of Indian ricegrass can come through more soil than those of most plants, so it is often one of the first plants to establish itself on blow soils such as this. (Picture by Soil Conservation Service, taken in Lake County, Oregon.)

Description:

Length of life—Long-lived perennial.

Height—Usually about 16 inches.

Sod or bunch—Bunch, rather compact tuft.

Leaves—Unusually long, some standing nearly as high as the heads, narrow, with a dry feeling, erect, nodding at tip.

Heads—Very open, branched, and rebranched.

Grain—One in a place, at the end of a hairlike branchlet, that is wavy and crooked. Outer chaff sticks to the grain, as is the case with oats and barley. Grain is hard and smooth.

Other names—Quincygrass, sandgrass, Indian millet.

Does it look like anything else? No. Once you learn this grass, you won't mistake it for any other.