

Slender Wheatgrass

(*Agropyron trachycaulum*)



Where is it found? Slender wheatgrass is a native in every Eastern Oregon county, but it didn't stand white man's use very well and now is located mostly on areas that haven't been disturbed much, such as steep rocky ledges, cemeteries, borders of fields not used for pasture, and places with above-average rainfall.

Is it important? Not very, in Oregon. In some states it is seeded, especially with sweet clover, for short rotations. It is excellent feed at all seasons, and is a good dryland hay grass.

What does it look like? It looks very much like quackgrass, but is a bunch grass, not sod-forming. It usually grows taller than desert (crested) wheat. The rather small clumps send up lots of heads on stems that, in good locations, may be 4 feet tall. Heads are slender, (hence the name) are straight-sided, and are beardless, or have beards short enough to be unnoticeable at a glance. There are not many basal leaves. Leaves well distributed along the stem, making it a good hay grass, but close pasturing kills it quickly.

Description

Length of life--Short-lived perennial. Most stands in Oregon begin to thin out in three years.

Height--Usually 30 to 40 inches.

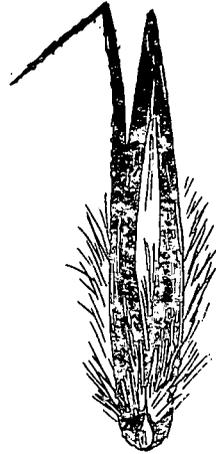
Sod or bunch--Bunch.

Leaves--Not so many basal leaves as blue bunch wheatgrass, or desert (crested) wheatgrass. Basal leaves are much longer than those on stems and slightly rough.

Lower leaves are up to 10 inches long, upper leaves usually about 2 inches.

Seed heads (panicles)--Very slender with spikelets close to the central stem, or rachis; often slightly purplish. Spikelets alternate up the rachis, which has a slightly zig-zag shape as a result. Heads usually 3 inches long or more.





Grain of slender
wheatgrass, Agropyron pauciflorum
(4x).

Grain of desert
wheatgrass (former-
ly called crested
wheatgrass),
Agropyron desert-
orum (4x).

Wild oat grain,
Avena fatua
(4x).

Grain of quack-
grass,
Agropyron repens
(4x).

Seed stalks--Erect, numerous. Joints on stems often are quite dark or purplish.

Does it look like anything else? Yes, it closely resembles quackgrass, Western wheatgrass, and some ryegrasses. It is purely a bunchgrass though, so if it has underground runners, it's not slender wheat. Also, most of the look-alikes have noticeable beards (awns), while slender wheat is awnless or has such short awns that they are not noticeable.