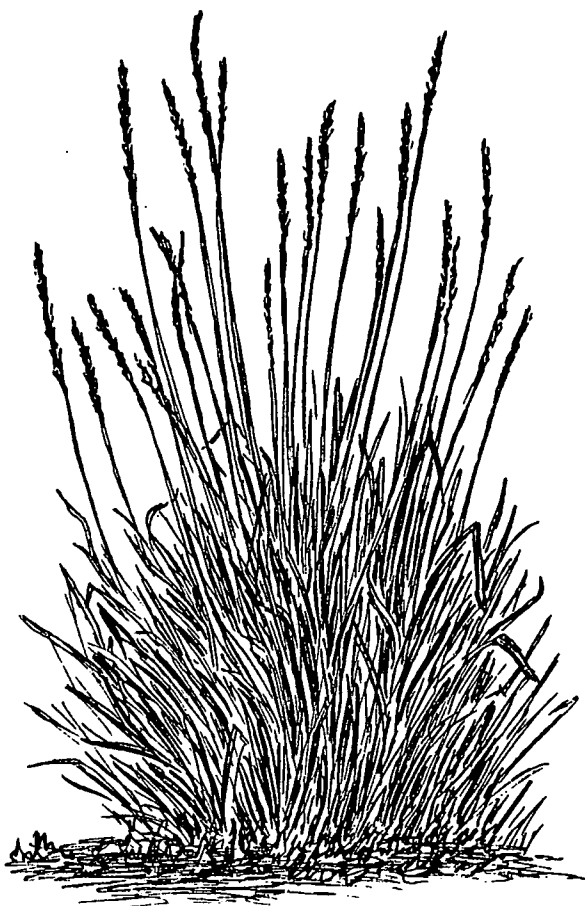


Giant Wild Rye

(Elymus condensatus)



Giant wild rye is a tall grass with long but compact heads.

Description:

Length of life -- Many years; old stems remain in the clump.

Growth period -- Leaves start growing about April 1 and stay green until fall weather cures them.

Method of spread -- Entirely by seeds, that are slow to start when planted. Roots are long-lived, thick, and quite extensive. Nothing grows close to a bunch of giant wild rye because of the robust root system stealing moisture from plants around it.

Where does it grow? This grass is native to every county in eastern Oregon. It lives on open range along streams and bottom lands where soil is deep. It also can be found on alkali flats. Sagebrush lives on the same range, but wild rye tolerates more alkali than sagebrush. Often it crowds out nearly everything else on land that is dry in summer but wet in spring.

Is it important? On certain ranches giant wild rye is important for winter grazing. It gets too big and coarse for summer grazing unless it is kept short. The edges get so harsh the blades can cut an animal's mouth. Winter rains and snows soften it. Some early spring grazing is possible but can kill out the bunches easily if continued regularly. Pioneers cut giant wild rye for hay where it was abundant. Not many ranchers do now. In early days it was the main feed for horses on many ranges, especially when snow covered the shorter grasses. But it still is an important range grass and on some ranges it furnishes from 10% to 30% of the feed.

What does it look like? This is probably the tallest grass on Oregon rangelands. It is always found in large bunches that get bigger than a cowboy's hat and tall as a man on horseback. Stems are higher than the leaves. Seed heads are erect and sometimes a foot long.

Leaves -- Harsh, flat, veined, with loose sheaths (part clasping the stem).

Seed -- Stems are erect and seed forms on long heads at the top.

Sod or bunch -- Definitely bunched in large clumps.

Does it look like anything else? No other bunch grass is so large and harsh. Tall wheatgrass is similar in that it tolerates alkali and dies if grazed closely, but tall wheatgrass does not make such large clumps and the heads are slim with the spikelets rather far apart. The heads of giant wild rye also are long, but are so compact the stem is rarely visible between spikelets.



Giant wild rye growing along a roadside in Morrow County. It grows in large clumps, dwarfing much of the other vegetation around it.