

Big Bluegrass

(Poa ampla)

Where does it grow? Big bluegrass is found in all parts of the West. Big bluegrass is found on moist, light textured soils. It grows on meadows and moist open ground on the east side of the Cascade Mountains in Oregon. Native big bluegrass was found most abundant on soils that have been plowed up for farming. Big bluegrass is common in the Northwest in association with such plants as Idaho fescue and timothy on fairly moist sites.



Is it important? Big bluegrass is seldom abundant in native vegetation complexes. However, it is important because of its heavy production, palatability, and tendency to start growth in early spring and continue growth into the fall. It is sometimes used for regrassing abandoned farm land because of its wide distribution and high production. For this use it is one of the most useful bluegrasses. It is only low to medium in its drought resistance. Heavy, continuous grazing and trampling are injurious to it. The seedlings of young plants are easily pulled up when grazed. However, big bluegrass produces large amounts of fibrous roots making it one of the best grasses to use in conservation mixtures.

What does it look like? It is a pale green or bluish perennial bunchgrass that grows about 2 to 4 feet tall. Plants are tufted and vigorous and have numerous basal leaves. The leaves are pale green, flat, rather long and have the characteristic boat-shaped tip of bluegrasses. Seedheads are 4 to 10 inches long (larger than most other bluegrasses) and are erect, narrow and dense.

Description:

Length of Life--Perennial.

Height--Usually 2 to 4 feet, depending on site.

Bunch or Sod--Bunch.

Growth period--Early spring to fall.

How does it spread?--By seed and sometimes by underground stems (rhizomes).

Shape of the leaves--Flat, 3/8 inch wide, 8 to 16 inches long and have boat shaped tips.

Location of leaves--Most leaves are basal and fairly dense, shorter leaves on the stems.

How to use it--Moderate grazing spring and summer. Can be used earlier than crested wheatgrass.

Does it look like anything else? Yes, it looks like other common "bunch" bluegrasses such as Sandberg bluegrass, Canby bluegrass, and Nevada bluegrass. But, it is generally much taller and has a longer seedhead than other bluegrasses. The boat-shaped leaf tip separates the bluegrasses from other grasses.
