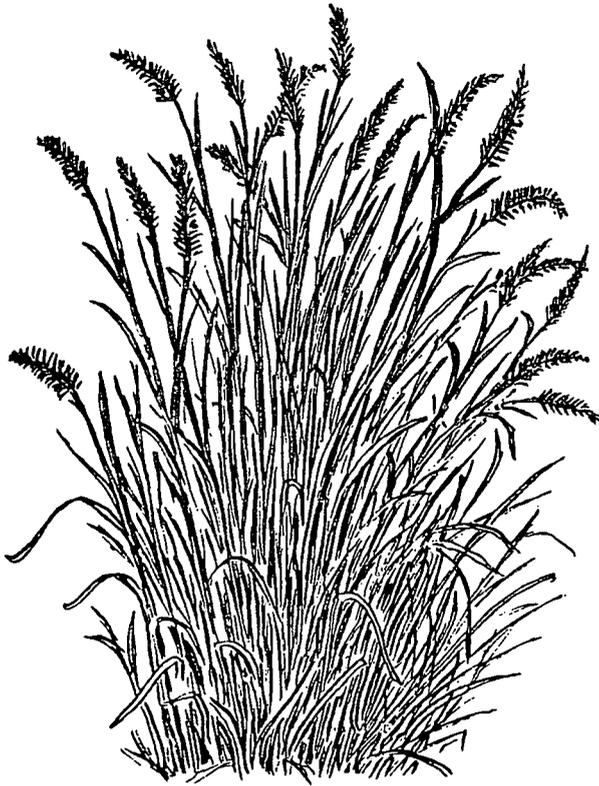


Desert Wheatgrass

(Agropyron desertorum)



Desert wheatgrass is the most useful dryland grass for Eastern Oregon (1/5x).

Where is it found? Desert wheatgrass (formerly called crested wheatgrass), was introduced into Oregon from Siberia, where it is the native bunchgrass on many millions of acres. It has been used for seeding drylands in every Eastern Oregon county. It does not like long snow cover nor very wet locations.

Is it important? Yes, very important; for seeding to improve Oregon ranges; for erosion control; for seeding with dryland alfalfa; for a rotation crop with wheat; for dryland lawns, parks, and roadside plantings.

What does it look like? The nodding head resembles a roached mane of a horse. It is a strong-growing bunchgrass, usually 18 inches tall. It starts very early in the spring and greens up with the first fall rains. The leaves and stems are still green when the heads are ripe. When ripe, the stems are tough, somewhat like broom straws. Heads are usually about 2 1/2 inches long and flat on each side.

Description:

Length of life--Very long-lived perennial.

Bunch or sod--Bunch, but in thin stands the bunches expand rapidly.

Root system--Extremely large and deep.

Leaves--Rarely as wide as half an inch, taper to long sharp point, rather light green, many basal leaves, but stems also well covered with leaves, some leaves feel rough on upper side.

Flower heads (spikes)--Not branched, 2 1/2 to 3 inches long, very flat on each side, spikelets arranged flatwise to the rachis (on main stalk) as in a wheat head.

Single head of desert wheatgrass. The flat dense head is different from the head of any other grass except other strains, such as Fairway (1x).



Spikelets--Entire spikelet tends to break off, including a group of eight or 10 seeds. Each grain has a very short beard. Single grain resembles a small oat.

Does it look like anything else? No, the flat heads are unlike any other grass found in Oregon. Some different strains of desert wheatgrass, though, are now on the market. The name crested wheatgrass has now been given to a special strain, called "Fairway."



Desert wheatgrass crowds out weeds and other grasses and will stand hard usage better than any native bunchgrass. This field is in Baker County.