



ARIZONA-SONORA
DESERT
MUSEUM

ARIZONA-SONORA DESERT MUSEUM PLANT CARE INFORMATION

Native Grasses

Many species of native Arizona perennial grasses need little or no irrigation once established in Tucson. All are warm-season growers; the tops are often dead and brown from late fall until the summer rains. Most will green up as early as April if watered. Those found in wetter areas need more water, but may stay greener longer.

-*Digitaria californica*, Arizona Cottontop, is a 2' tall bunchgrass with fluffy white seed heads, particularly striking when backlit by the sun. Needs no irrigation in Tucson.

-*Eragrostis intermedia*, Plains Lovegrass, is a bunchgrass with fine foliage about 1½' tall and very loose, almost mist-like, spike. First to green up in spring. Tolerant of light shade.

-*Heteropogon contortus*, Tanglehead, is an large bunchgrass. Dark green leaves turn coppery in the fall. Seed heads with tangled awns are reddish in color. Grow in full sun. Spreads by seed.

-*Hilaria belangeri*, Curly Mesquite, is a small, fine-textured bunchgrass, spreading by aerial stolons. Grow in full sun to light shade. Good for holding slopes. Blue butterflies seen feeding on flowers.

(over)



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-Hilaria mutica, Tobosa Grass, is a very tough grass to about 1' tall. With good watering it becomes stoloniferous and can form a sod.

-Hilaria rigida, Big Galleta, is a true desert grass that can survive on 5" of rainfall. Coarse, upright, Shrub-like growth habit to about 3' tall, spreads slowly by rhizomes. Inconspicuous spikes. Grows best in sandy soil, even pure sand.

-Hopia obtusa, Vine Mesquite, is a perennial growing to 2' tall, spreading by vigorous runners. Spikes of large seeds attract birds, and is a larval plant for Roadside Skipper butterflies.

-Leptochloa dubia, Green Sprangletop, is a medium to large sprawling bunchgrass with broad, bright green leaves. Best with supplemental irrigation. Grow in full sun to moderate shade.

-Lycurus setosus, Wolftail, is an attractive small to medium-sized bunchgrass. Narrow leaves and a fuzzy, narrow flower spike give this grass a delicate look. Takes full sun to light shade.

CULTURE: Most of our grasses need full sun to do well and will perform best in heavy, clay-rich soil. They will need more water in well-drained soils. Plant container-grown plants at the same depth as they were in the pot. Water both seedlings and transplants generously and deeply through the first summer to establish a deep root system which may go down three feet or more. Also protect from rabbits and other wildlife until growing vigorously.

Once established many can survive on rainfall plus occasional summer irrigation except as noted. More water results in larger plants. The dead stems from previous years are persistent and tend to shade out new growth. Cut them to the ground at least every two years to rejuvenate them.

"Dew" on leaves in the morning is actually natural leakage from within the leaf. Butterflies find this an irresistible source of moisture and minerals.

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