



Photo by Nancy Ohlenbusch



Sideoats grama (*Bouteloua curtipendula*) is a warm season, mid-grass bunch or rhizomatous grass. It is the state native grass of Texas, designated in 1971 by the state legislature. It is drought tolerant and can survive lengthy droughts if managed properly.

One of the mainstays of the prairies, it is often overlooked as a major forage plant. It grows best on well-drained uplands, shallow ridges and rocky slopes. It is adapted to a wide variety of soil and climatic conditions, but prefers a medium or coarse soil. Sideoats grama may become the dominant species on shallow calcareous sites.

Sideoats grama can be found with bluestems, Western wheatgrass, and blue and hairy grama in native prairies. The best stands of sideoats grama are found on rocky open slopes, shallow woodlands and forest openings up to an elevation of 7,000 feet. It has been documented in all the 48 states, except Nevada and North Carolina. It is also found in central and western Canada, and in Mexico.

Sideoats Gramma

A Native Texan

By Paul D. Ohlenbusch

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MANAGEMENT NOTES FOR SEPTEMBER THROUGH NOVEMBER



Monitor water sources to ensure availability. Develop options if sources appear to be less than optimal.

Evaluate the status of desirable species to ensure overgrazing is not happening. Having enough leaf growth on the plants going into the killing frost time is the most critical period for most perennial plants.

Evaluate rainfall history and current soil moisture status. If soil moisture is short, late-season plant growth may be limited. Limited or no soil moisture usually means little or no plant growth to prepare for next year.

If adequate plant growth is present, avoid the urge to add animals to harvest the forage. This is the best time for plants to store food for next year. Stockpile the extra forage for fall and winter use, and look to the future.

Review and adjust grazing and economic management plans for the rest of 2008 and adjust for current and past weather conditions. Begin looking at past weather conditions and changing economic conditions to update planning for 2009 and for adjusting the five-year management plan.

Monitor broadleaf and woody plants to determine if control will be needed next year.

Start planning for prescribed burns to be done in 2009. Planning is important to a safe and effective prescribed burn.


Start planning and preparing areas for seeding in 2009. Being prepared can lead to a higher success rate. 

TABLE 12. THE RECOMMENDED CULTIVARS OF SIDEOATS GRAMA COME FROM MANY LOCATIONS AND ARE ADAPTED TO BROAD AREAS.

CULTIVAR	COLLECTED NEAR	RELEASED	BY
El Reno	El Reno, Oklahoma	1944	Kansas Plant Materials Center and Kansas AES.
Haskell	Haskell, Texas	1983	James E. "Bud" Smith Plant Materials Center, Texas AES and USDA-ARS.
Niner	Socorro, New Mexico	1984	SCS and the New Mexico and Colorado AES
Premier	Cuauhtemoc and Chihuahua, Mexico	1960 NRCS.	Texas AES and USDA-ARS and USDA-
Uvalde*	In Texas		
Vaughn	Vaughn, New Mexico	1940	New Mexico AES and SCS Plant Science Division

* little information is available on this cultivar

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Sideoats grama is the largest plant of the grama genus, *Bouteloua*, which includes 25 species in North America. Other Texas species include blue grama (*Bouteloua gracilis*), hairy grama (*Bouteloua hirsuta*), red grama (*Bouteloua trifida*), black grama (*Bouteloua eriopoda*), Texas grama (*Bouteloua rigidisetata*) and sixweeks grama (*Bouteloua barbata*). Of these, sideoats grama, blue grama and hairy grama are the most common.

Sideoats grama's name comes from the orientation of the seed that appears to come off one side of the stem. Seed stalks appear from June through the summer. Flowering is evident by the orange-red anthers produced from the side of the stalk. The leaves are bluish-green, becoming a reddish-brown color in the fall. The plant has leaves with long, sparse hairs originating from small glands at the edge of the leaf. Sideoats grama is easily identified from blue and hairy grama by the seed stalk (Figure 1).

As the emphasis on native grasses has increased throughout the United States, several states have designated sideoats grama as endangered (Connecticut, New Jersey, New York), threatened (Michigan, Pennsylvania) and of special concern in Kentucky. In Texas, the USDA Plant Materials system is looking for germ plasm material for developing more adapted named cultivars (varieties) for use in prairie restoration and reclamation projects.

The current cultivars used in Texas include El Reno, Haskell, Niner, Premier,




The seed heads of sideoats grama (left), is different than blue grama (center) and hairy grama (note spike on right end) which are very similar. Photos by Mike Haddock

Uvalde and Vaughn (Table 12). Native harvested seed, often called Texas sideoats, is used in restoration projects since there is a lack of named cultivars. When using native harvested seed, the origin should not exceed 200 miles north, 300 miles south, 100 miles east and 200 miles west of the seeding location.

Sideoats grama has had other uses in the past. Among them were the grass was bundled, dried and made into brooms or hairbrushes. The moist grass was laid onto hot stones to prevent steam from escaping while cooking. The Kiowa warriors, who in battle had killed an enemy with a lance, wore the seed stalk in their hair because the grass stalk resembled a feathered lance.

If you would like to learn more about sideoats grama, see the Web site at www.grassbydesign.com/TDA/so2008.htm.

Next time, a look at native grass seed and the "ins and outs" of seeding. 

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