

Blue grama (*Bouteloua gracilis*)

Family: Grass
(*Poaceae*)

DESCRIPTION: Blue grama's diminutive height is a product of its low-nutrient, dry prairie habitat. The native perennial is a bunch grass, growing in dense clumps. The plant flowers in late June to early July; the flower head remains throughout the growing season. The blue-green plant turns a golden brown in the fall and produces spikelets that resemble eyelashes.

USES: A larval host to several butterfly and moth species, blue grama is also an important forage grass. Its showy spikes and curly leaves make it a popular ornamental grass in home gardens. Drought resistance makes it a good choice for restoration projects.

REFERENCES:

[Minnesota Wildflowers](#)
[Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center](#)



Range Map Credit: USDA Plants Database



Photo Credit: Scott Milburn

Planting Recommendations

Blue grama is often commercially available from native plant growers. Consumers should be aware of the popular cultivar version, Blonde Ambition, a non-native variety. Prairie species planted in gardens tend to grow much larger than they would in the wild, but blue grama rarely grows taller than 1 foot. In gardens, grasses provide physical support and food for birds. Plugs are generally inexpensive, and the plants tend to establish quickly.

Blue grama is a good choice for dry and open settings with full light, particularly in south-facing yards. Complementary low-growing companion species include pasque flowers, field pussytoes, butterfly weed, whorled milkweed, harebells, hairy grama, white prairie clover, purple prairie clover, prairie smoke, alum root, Junegrass, dotted blazing star, pale-spiked lobelia, prairie phlox, gray goldenrod, upland white asters and silky asters.

Developed by Scott Milburn, a professional field botanist and owner of Midwest Natural Resources, Inc. and long-serving president of the Minnesota Native Plant Society



STATEWIDE WETLAND INDICATOR STATUS: None

ID: Blue grama is a tufted, short grass with fine leaves. The plant produces horizontal, eyelash-like spikelets. The silvery spikelets mature to a reddish-purple, which ripen to light brown seed heads that persist through winter. The plant's blue-green foliage turns golden brown in fall.

SIMILAR SPECIES:

Side-oats grama (*Bouteloua curtipendula*), buffalo grass (*Bouteloua dactyloides*) and hairy grama (*Bouteloua hirsuta*) also grow in dense clumps, but the flower heads of side-oats grama and buffalo grass differ in color and shape. Blue grama most closely resembles hairy grama, but the key difference is the rachis — the structure to which the spikelets attach. In hairy grama, the rachis extends past the terminal spikelet.