

CAUCASIAN BLUESTEM

Bothriochloa bladhii (Retz.)

S.T. Blake
plant symbol = BOBL

Contributed by: USDA NRCS Plant Materials Program



USDA NRCS National Plant Materials Center
Beltsville, MD

Uses

Caucasian bluestem is sometimes used as a critical area cover plant due to its ability to grow on droughty, acid, sterile sites. It should be used in mixtures with native warm season grasses because it is not a particularly valuable wildlife plant. This plant is not reliably hardy north of the PA-NY border. Though used for forage in the southern Midwest, the quality is not high enough to use it in this way in the Northeast.

Status

Please consult the PLANTS Web site and your State Department of Natural Resources for this plant's current status (e.g. threatened or endangered species, state noxious status, and wetland indicator values).

Description

Caucasian bluestem has dense blue-green leaves and thin stems with purple tinges at the nodes. It typically grows to 3-4 feet in height. The seed head is a terminal group of spike-like stalks that come from a common point. The most memorable characteristic is the sweet, distinctive odor of the foliage.

Adaptation and Distribution

This grass will grow on soils of moderate drainage or better. It will grow well on acid, droughty, and low fertility soils. The best use for this grass is on drastically disturbed sites such as strip mine RAMP sites in PA and South.

For a current distribution map, please consult the Plant Profile page for this species on the PLANTS Website.

Establishment

Caucasian bluestem should be seeded as the soil warms in the spring. The germination is slow compared to cool season grasses and the two types of grass are almost never planted together. Native grass drills such as the Truax, Great Plains, or Tye are the best units for planting this seed as they have positive feed mechanisms for chaffy seed and double disk furrow openers. If a suitable drill is not available or cannot be used due to terrain, then broadcasting the seed and tracking it in with a bulldozer is also an excellent planting method. Hydroseeding without tracking is simply a waste of time, money, and effort. Mulches are avoided with warm season grass plantings unless absolutely necessary to control erosion--then use 1500 pounds per acre of straw as a maximum rate. No nitrogen fertilizer should be applied during the seeding year. Phosphorus and potassium should be at medium levels, and the pH should be 5.5 or better on forage fields and 5.0 or better on critical areas.

Management

Once established, there is little management needed for this species. It does not respond as strongly to fire as do our native species.

Cultivars, Improved, and Selected Materials (and area of origin)

There are several hybrid cultivars from Oklahoma and Texas, but these are not recommended for use in the Northeast. Caucasian bluestem, sold under that name, is the best of the non-native bluestems.

Prepared By & Species Coordinator:

USDA NRCS Northeast Plant Materials Program

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For more information about this and other plants, please contact your local NRCS field office or Conservation District, and visit the PLANTS <<http://plants.usda.gov>> and Plant Materials Program Web sites <<http://Plant-Materials.nrcs.usda.gov>>.

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