

CANADA WILDRYE

Elymus canadensis L.

plant symbol = ELCA4

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Uses

Restoration: Canada wildrye is often an early successional component of prairie mixtures.

Livestock: Canada wildrye provides good forage quality during the early part of the grazing season but is generally considered an inferior forage after it matures. It is fairly palatable to most livestock, and is rated good in energy value but poor in protein value.

Wildlife: Canada wildrye has fair to good palatability as food for wildlife. It also provides nesting, brood, winter, and escape cover.

Erosion Control: Exceptional seedling vigor and rapid establishment make Canada wildrye an excellent species for use in erosion control seedings. Stands of Canada wildrye typically establish during the 1st year, reach peak production the 2nd or 3rd year, and then rapidly thin out. This species is sometimes used in seeding mixtures where quick development and stabilization is needed.

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

Canada wildrye is a native perennial bunchgrass that grows to 4 feet with erect or arching culms and flat, wide (up to 0.8 inches), waxy green, pointed leaves that grow from the base of the stem to the spike. Auricles are claw-like and clasping, arising from a broad, yellowish or light green collar. The thick and bristly spikelets can reach 10 inches in length, and are often 2 or 3 to a node. There are approximately 115,000 seeds per pound.

Adaptation and Distribution

Canada wildrye is a short-lived, cool-season grass found on sandy shores and dunes; wooded areas, especially along trails, rivers and streams; and other disturbed sites throughout much of the North America. Seedlings are vigorous and establish quickly, but are not highly competitive with other grasses. Growth begins later in the spring and lasts longer into the summer than growth of smooth brome. It is moderately drought tolerant and winter hardy. It has good tolerance to salinity and tolerates shade very well.

Canada wildrye is distributed throughout the northeast, north, and western United States. For a current distribution map, please consult the Plant Profile page for this species on the PLANTS Website.

Establishment

Canada wildrye is typically seeded in a mix with warm season and/or other cool season grasses. Native forbs can also be included to enhance the restoration benefits. Planting may be completed in the spring or late fall, or early fall if moisture conditions are satisfactory. The seedbed should be firm and weed problems eliminated prior to planting. Seeding rates will vary between 0.5 and 4.0 lbs./acre depending on the mix and site conditions. If planted alone, solid seed at 10 lbs./acre (for conservation use), or 5 lbs. acre in rows (for seed production).

Management

For good quality, nutritious hay Canada wildrye should be cut just as the heads are emerging from the boot. When used for pasture, grazing should be delayed until there is at least 5 inches of growth. Canada wildrye generally decreases in response to grazing.

Because its crown has coarse stems and leaves, Canada wildrye is somewhat resistant to fire mortality.

However, susceptibility increases when burns are conducted after the initiation of spring growth.

Pests and Potential Problems

Canada wildrye is susceptible to leaf and stem rust, and to ergot.

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

'Mandan' (North Dakota) was released by ARS Northern Great Plains Research Laboratory for use in the northern Great Plains states.

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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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