THIN PASPALUM

Paspalum setaceum Michx.

plant symbol = PASE5

Contributed by: USDA NRCS Kika de la Garza Plant Materials Center

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Kingsville, TX

Uses

Forage: In Texas, thin paspalum (*Paspalum setaceum*) provides fair quality livestock forage. It also has low forage value for deer.

Wildlife: Birds will eat the seed; however, low seed production limits this use.

Restoration: Thin paspalum can be used in native site restoration. However, limited seed production will make it impractical for use in larger projects.

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

Thin paspalum is a short-lived, warm-season, tufted, perennial grass that grows 2 ½ to 3 feet tall. The base of the plant is knotty and has short rhizomes. It is a member of the *Paniceae* tribe of Poaceae, the grass family (Hitchcock, 1971). There are four varieties of *Paspalum setaceum*: *setaceum, stramineum, muhlenbergii,* and *ciliatifolium.* Not all plant authorities recognize these varieties.

Paspalum setaceum var. *setaceum* (previously *P. debile*) is identified by some plant authorities as thin paspalum. Others recognize the varieties, but consider thin paspalum to be *Paspalum setaceum*, a separate entity from the other varieties. Still others see thin paspalum as the whole *Paspalum setaceum* complex, and do not recognize the individual varieties at all. The varieties will be discussed herein because the most recent authority recognizes them.

The variety *setaceum* (previously *P. debile*, which Gould (1975) calls thin paspalum) can be differentiated from the other varieties as having narrower leaf blades, shorter spikelets, and gray-green herbage.

The variety *stramineum* (previously P. *stramineum*) is distinguished from the other varieties by narrower leaf blades and yellow-green foliage.

The variety *muhlenbergii* (previously P. *muhlenbergii* and P. *pubescens*) has light to dark green, pilose leaf blades and is distinguished by a conspicuous midvein on the lower floret.

Finally, the variety *ciliatifolium* (previously *P. ciliatifolium* and *P. propinquum*) is recognized by its glabrous dark green to purplish herbage. It is commonly called fringeleaf paspalum.

It is important to note that populations of widely variable, but intergrading plant types are included in the *Paspalum setaceum* complex.

Adaptation and Distribution
Thin paspalum is found along the Atlantic Coast from Massachusetts to Florida, along the Gulf Coast to Texas and south into Mexico, and also found inland in Ohio, West Virginia, Kentucky, and Tennessee. In Texas, it can be found throughout most of the state, but it is rare in the Edwards Plateau and Trans-Pecos regions. It is the most common in East, and Southeast Texas, and the Coastal portions of the Rio Grande Plains.

The variety *setaceum* has a similar distribution, but can also be found in Cuba. The variety *stramineum* has a wider distribution. It grows from Massachusetts west to Minnesota, south to Florida, Texas and Eastern Arizona, down the gulf coast as far as Panama, and can be found in the West Indies and Caribbean Islands as well. This is the most common variety in Texas.

The variety *muhlenbergii* is found from the Atlantic Coast west to Iowa and south to Texas. It is common in Northeast Texas. The variety *ciliatifolium* is found mostly at inland sites from New Jersey to Florida, west to Oklahoma and Texas, and in the West Indies.

In Texas, it is found in the Pineywoods, Post Oak Savannah, and Coastal Plains regions, but not on the immediate coast and rarely farther south than Harris County.

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

All the varieties prefer sandy soils, but will grow in other soil types. Plants are typically found in open woods, open ground, in old fields, in ditches, and along wood borders.

Establishment
Thin paspalum can be best reproduced from seed. However, germination testing at the Plant Materials Center yielded only an average germination of five percent. There are approximately 705,304 seeds per pound of thin paspaulm.

Management
Thin paspalum does not require much management. A seed increase plot of thin paspalum growing at the Plant Materials Center has shown itself to be relatively drought hardy.

Pests and Potential Problems
Low seed production and germination seem to be the main problems when using this grass.

For additional assistance regarding the production and establishment of thin paspalum, please contact the Plant Materials Center at (361) 595-1313.

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