



BEARGRASS

Nolina microcarpa S. Wats.

plant symbol = NOMI

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Alternate Names

Sacahuista

Uses

Ethnobotanic: Beargrass formed the stuffing or warp of Papago coiled baskets. The blades were cut off near the ground and the saw-like edges are scraped away with a knife, split in two or more sections, and bundled and stored until used. Beargrass leaves were sometimes used in Jemez Pueblo ring baskets and they were the preferred materials for other southerly Rio Grande Pueblos earlier in this century. The Pima used beargrass in their baskets. They sun-dried the leaves and then split them into four, five or six strands before using them. These materials are still being gathered

today and woven into baskets. The Isleta Pueblo in New Mexico ground beargrass seeds into flour for food. They also drank a tea of boiled beargrass roots as a cure for pneumonia and rheumatism.

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

General: Lily Family (Liliaceae). This native, acaulescent perennial has long, narrow leaves with small teeth along their margins. The leaves are narrow--6-12 mm. wide and 6-12 dm. long. Beargrass has a dense cluster of white flowers on a long stalk, up to 2 m tall. The flowers are minute and cream-tan, and the round fruits are deeply notched at the apex. The seeds are light yellow-brown to nearly black and finely wrinkled.

Distribution

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

Establishment

Adaptation: The plant is found on exposed mountainsides throughout much of Arizona, and similar elevations eastward through New Mexico into western Texas and adjacent Chihuahua and northeastern Sonora.

General: Establish the plant by seed. Plant the seeds in a flat in a nursery at a depth that is the width of the seeds. The seeds should be planted in the spring in well-drained soil with a coarse layer of sand on top and gently watered. Protect the flat from animals. Let the surface of the soil dry out between watering. If the flats are watered too often, this can cause the plants to rot. A good indicator of over-watering is that the plants wilt. Once the seedlings have leaves and are at least two inches tall with sturdiness to them, transplant them into individual pots with good drainage holes. After transplanting, put the containers in a shady area that is protected from wind and animals such as a lath house or a shady grove of trees.

After one and one-half years, plant the plants outdoors in lower elevations in mid-to-late fall or early winter. In higher elevations where the ground freezes, it is best to plant the plants when the ground thaws. After planting, water the plants and let them dry out on the

surface between watering. During the rainy season, supplement with hand watering if the rains are insufficient. Plant the plants in a well-drained, well-aerated soil. Plant in partial shade, using a shade cloth or other means until well-established and then remove the shade cloth to expose the plant to full sun. Water the plant through the summer. It will be necessary to water the plant for several years until well established. In areas without summer rainfall, continue to water the plant in summer throughout the life of the plant.

Management

If the plant begins to have an unkempt, matted appearance, prune it back in late winter or early spring after the danger of frost is past.

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

Please check the Vendor Database, expected to be on-line through the PLANTS Web site in 2001 by clicking on Plant Materials. These plant materials are readily available from commercial sources.

References

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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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