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The Grasses of Nebraska

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REPORT OF THE BOTANIST.

THE GRASSES OF NEBRASKA.

BY CHARLES E. BESSEY, PH. D., STATE BOTANIST.

Thirteen years ago I published "A Preliminary List of the Grasses of Nebraska" in the Annual Report of the State Board of Agriculture for the year 1891, * including the "species which grow wild, or which have escaped from cultivation and maintain themselves without our care." One hundred and fifty-four grasses were enumerated of which one hundred and thirty-six were indigenous.

A year later this was followed by "A Preliminary Description of the Native and Introduced Grasses of Nebraska," † also including one hundred and fifty species, of which one hundred and twenty-six were regarded as indigenous, twenty-eight being introduced either as cultivated plants, or as mere weeds. The present list includes two hundred species, of which fifty are introduced, while fully one hundred and fifty are indigenous.

The Grass Family (Gramineae) is now held to include somewhat more than 8,500 species, distributed among thirteen tribes. It will be seen from the list below that of these thirteen tribes we have representatives of ten. One of the unrepresented tribes contains the Bamboos (Bambuseae) which are almost wholly tropical and subtropical. The two remaining small tribes (Zoysieae and Tristegineae) are also tropical and subtropical.

The arrangement of the tribes here given differs from that usually followed. It expresses more nearly my ideas of their proper relationship.

FAMILY GRAMINEAE.—THE GRASSES.

TRIBE I.—Festuceae.—THE FESCUE GRASSES.

This is one of the largest tribes of the grasses and contains many very valuable species for forage purposes. They are usually of medium size, and nearly always have spreading tops (panicles) of several-flowered spikelets. We have sixty-three species, of which forty-seven are indigenous.

1. Hungarian Brome Grass (Bromus inermis Leyss.). This is the well-known Brome Grass, which has proved to be such a valuable addition to the forage plants of the state.

2. Wood Chess (Bromus ciliatus L.). Throughout the state.

* Issued as a separate pamphlet under date of April 15, 1892.
† Annual Report of the Nebraska State Board of Agriculture for 1892, pp. 209-279. Issued as a separate pamphlet under date of June 27, 1903.

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5. Soft Chess (*Bromus hordeaceus* L.). A native of Europe, which has become widely distributed, having reached Nebraska.

6. Chess, or Cheat (*Bromus secalinus* L.). Becoming common in wheat fields since the cultivation of winter wheat has been general in the state.

7. Upright Chess (*Bromus racemosus* L.). Introduced as a weedy grass in the eastern portion of the state.


9. Western Brome Grass (*Bromus marginatus* Nees). This western species, native of the Rocky Mountain region from Alberta to Arizona, is being introduced experimentally as a promising forage plant.

10. Slender Fescue (*Festuca octoflora* Walt.). Common in central and western Nebraska, where, for several years, it has been more than usually abundant.


12. Tall Fescue (*Festuca elatior* L.). A valuable cultivated forage plant, which has been introduced in eastern Nebraska.


17. Meadow Fescue (*Festuca pratensis* Huds.). A native of Europe, long cultivated in the Eastern United States, and now being introduced into Nebraska as a valuable forage plant.


23. Large Quake Grass (*Briza maxima* L.). Grown in gardens as an ornamental grass, on account of its large, inflated spikelets.


26. False Fescue (*Schochloa festucaea* (Willd.) Link.). Central Nebraska.

27. Annual Blue Grass (*Poa annua* L.). Introduced as a weedy annual in eastern Nebraska.


30. Kentucky Blue Grass (*Poa pratensis* L.). One of the best pasture and lawn grasses, now commonly introduced in all portions of the state.


33. Wild Blue Grass (*Poa pseudopracensis* Scribner & Rydberg). In central and western Nebraska, where it resembles Kentucky blue grass.

34. Canadian Blue Grass (*Poa compressa* L.). Eastern and northern Nebraska, and often sown for growing in lawns.

35. Prairie Blue Grass (*Poa arida* Vasey). Throughout the state.

36. Mountain Blue Grass (*Poa alpina* L.). In western Nebraska.

37. Buckley's Blue Grass (*Poa buckleyana* Nash). Central and northwestern counties.


40. Western Blue Grass (*Poa lucida* Vasey). Western Nebraska.

41. Hairy Blue Grass (*Poa laevigata* Scrib.). Western Nebraska.

42. Big Candy Grass (*Eragrostis major* Host.). Widely distributed as one of the most common of introduced weeds.

43. Purple Candy Grass (*Eragrostis pectinacea* (Mx.) Steud.). A pretty, purplish, weedy grass, widely distributed in the state.

44. Pursh's Candy Grass (*Eragrostis purshii* Schrad.). Widely distributed.

45. Frank's Candy Grass (*Eragrostis frankii* Steud.). Probably to be found in eastern Nebraska, although not yet collected.

46. Slender Candy Grass (*Eragrostis pilosa* (L.) Beauv.). Specimens
which seem to be of this species have been collected in northern Nebraska.


50. Orchard Grass (*Dactylis glomerata* L.). Grown to some extent in eastern Nebraska, and appearing as a "volunteer" in many meadows and pastures.

51. Salt Grass (*Distichlis spicata* (L.) Greene). Common throughout the state on salt marshes and alkaline soils, where it thrives in the salt-saturated earth.


53. Wild June Grass (*Koeleria cristata* (L.) Pers.). A common prairie grass throughout the state.

54. Water Grass (*Catabrosa aquatica* (L.) Beauv.). An aquatic grass of central and western Nebraska.

55. Tall Melic Grass (*Melica diffusa* Pursh). Eastern Nebraska.


57. Spike Grass (*Diplachne acuminata* Nash). Central to northeastern Nebraska.


59. Purple Sand Grass (*Triplasis purpurea* (Walt.) Chapm.). Northern Nebraska.

60. Tall Red-top (*Tricuspis seslerioides* (Mx.) Torr.). In southeastern Nebraska.

61. Reed (*Phragmites phragmites* (L.) Karst.). Throughout the state, in ponds and other wet places, where it attains a height of ten feet or more.


63. False Buffalo Grass (*Munroa squarrosa* (Nutt.) Torr.). Central and western Nebraska.

**Tribe II.—Hordeae.—The Wheat Grasses.**

In this tribe are included some of the most important cereals, as the various kinds of wheat, rye and barley. The plants are rather large grasses, with erect, stout stems, which terminate in single cylindrical heads, consisting of large spikelets, sessile alternately on the opposite
sides of the more or less zigzag axis. We have thirty-two species, of which twenty-three are indigenous.

64. Richardson's Wheat Grass (Agropyrum richardsonii Schrad.). Western Nebraska.


66. Slender Wheat Grass (Agropyrum tenerum Vasey). Western Nebraska.


68. Gmelen's Wheat Grass (Agropyrum gmeleni Scribn. & Sm.). Western Nebraska.

69. Western Wheat Grass (Agropyrum occidentale Scribn.). Common throughout the state and recognized as one of the best of the native grasses.

70. Northern Wheat Grass (Agropyrum dasystachyum (Hook.) Vasey). Northwestern Nebraska.

71. False Quack Grass (Agropyrum pseudorepens Scribn. & Sm.). Widely distributed in the state.

72. Quack Grass (Agropyrum repens (L.) Beauv.). Apparently common, although no doubt often confused with the preceding.


74. Einkorn (Triticum monococcum L.). A species of wheat in which the slender head breaks up very easily into short joints. It is grown only as a curiosity.

75. Polish Wheat (Triticum polonicum L.). Known by its very large chaff. It is occasionally grown as a curiosity and is sometimes shown at fairs under the name of "Giant Rye," although it is really a wheat.

76. Common Wheat (Triticum vulgare Vill.). This includes "spring," "winter," "bearded" and "smooth" varieties.

77. Macaroni Wheat (Triticum durum Desf.). Recently introduced successfully as a valuable wheat, especially in the drier portions of the state.

78. Spelt (Triticum spelta L.). Grown somewhat in the state. It has a loose, slim head, which is bearded in some varieties, and smooth in others, and the grains are permanently enclosed in the hard chaff.

79. Emmer (Triticum dicoccum Schrank). This wheat has been introduced in Nebraska within the last few years. It has a compact, flat, two-ranked head, which is always bearded, and its grains are permanently enclosed in the hard chaff.
80. Rye (*Secale cereale* L.). Grown to a limited extent in eastern Nebraska.

81. Slender Wild Rye (*Elymus striatus* Willd.). Central and western Nebraska.


83. Hairy Wild Rye (*Elymus hirsutiglumis* Scribn. & Sm.). Northern Nebraska.

84. Common Wild Rye (*Elymus canadensis* L.). Common throughout the state. A glaucous variety (var. *glaucifolius* (Muhl.) Torr.) is occasionally found with the common form.

85. Short-headed Wild Rye (*Elymus brachystachys* Scribn. & Sm.). Although I have no specimens of this species it is certainly a native of the state.

86. Big Wild Rye (*Elymus robustus* Scribn. & Sm.). Central Nebraska.

87. Beardless Wild Rye (*Elymus condensatus* Presl.). Central Nebraska.

88. Smooth Wild Rye (*Elymus glaucus* Buckl.). Pretty generally distributed throughout the state.


94. Little Wild Barley (*Hordeum pusillum* Nutt.). In the foothill region in western Nebraska.

95. Field Barley (*Hordeum sativum* Jessen). Commonly cultivated in many of the eastern counties.

**Tribe III.—Chlorideae.—The Grama Grasses.**

The plants of this tribe are peculiar in having their spikelets arranged in one-sided spikes. The plants are of medium size, or even small, in some cases not being more than a few inches in height. We have ten species, of which eight are indigenous.


98. Slough Grass (*Beckmannia eruciformis* (L.) Host.). In wet places in central Nebraska.
99. Buffalo Grass (*Bulbilis dactyloides* (Nutt.) Raf.). Formerly common throughout the state, but now rare in eastern Nebraska.

100. Black Grama (*Bouteloua hirsuta* Lag.). Common throughout the state, but more common westward.

101. Blue Grama (*Bouteloua oligostachya* (Nutt.) Torr.). The common Grama throughout the state.

102. Tall Grama (*Atheropogon curtipendulus* (Nutt.) Torr.). Throughout the state, and considered to be one of the most promising of our wild grasses for bringing under cultivation.

103. Cord Grass (*Spartina cynosuroides* (L.) Willd.). In moist lands throughout the state.

104. Little Cord Grass (*Spartina gracilis* Trin.). Western Nebraska.

105. Wild Crab Grass (*Schedonardus paniculatus* (Nutt.) Trelease). A short, weedy, wiry grass, which is common throughout the state.

**TRIBE IV.—Aveneae.—The Oat Grasses.**

This small tribe of grasses is characterized by having the awns (beards) when present, on the back of the chaff, instead of at the top, as in most other tribes. We have seven species, of which four are indigenous.

106. Wild Oat-grass (*Danthonia spicata* (L.) Beauv.). Although no authentic specimens of this species have been collected within the borders of Nebraska, it is known to occur in the Black Hills, and in Kansas, and doubtless will be found in western Nebraska.


108. Wild Oats (*Avena striata* Michx.). In northern and northwestern Nebraska.

109. Yellow Oat-grass (*Trisetum flavescens* (L.) R. & S.). Introduced into cultivation in eastern Nebraska to a limited extent.

110. Narrow Oat-grass (*Trisetum subspicatum* (L.) Beauv.). While this species has not yet been detected in Nebraska it probably occurs in the western counties.

111. Tufted Hair-grass (*Deschampsia caespitosa* (L.) Beauv.). Known to occur in Wyoming, and to be looked for in our western counties. It has been grown under cultivation to a limited extent in eastern Nebraska.

112. Tall Oat-grass (*Arrhenatherum elatius* (L.) Beauv.). A valuable old world grass which is now considerably grown for forage in eastern Nebraska.

**TRIBE V.—Agrostideae.—The Meadow Grasses.**

In this large tribe, which is represented in our flora by many native species, the spikelets are typically one-flowered, and the heads are gen-
erally loose and spreading (paniculate), although in a few cases they are spiked, as in the common timothy. We have forty-four species, of which forty-one are indigenous.

113. Prairie Dropseed Grass (*Sporobolus asper* (Mx.) Kunth). On the eastern prairies and the central sand hills of the state.

114. Long-leaf Dropseed Grass (*Sporobolus longifolius* (Torr.) Wood.). Said to occur in the state (Britton's Manual), but I have had no authentic specimens.

115. Large Poverty Grass (*Sporobolus vaginaeflorus* (Torr.) Wood.). Widely distributed in the eastern half of the state.


118. Prairie Dropseed Grass (*Sporobolus cuspidatus* (Torr.) Wood.). Throughout the state.


120. Sand Dropseed Grass (*Sporobolus cryptandrus* (Torr.) A. Gray). Throughout the state.


123. Annual Dropseed Grass (*Sporobolus confusus* Vasey). Western Nebraska.

124. Blue-joint Grass (*Calamagrostis canadensis* (Mx.) Beauv.). A large prairie grass of the eastern half of the state.

125. Macoun's Reed-grass (*Calamagrostis macouniana* Vasey). According to the range given in Britton's Manual ("Manitoba and Montana to Washington, south to Missouri.") this must occur in Nebraska, but I have no authentic specimens.

126. Narrow Reed-grass (*Calamagrostis neglecta* (Ehrh.) Gaertn.). Throughout the state.

127. Slender Reed-grass (*Calamagrostis confinis* Nutt.). Widely distributed.

128. Sand Grass (*Calamovilfa longifolia* (Hook.) Hack.). Throughout the state.

129. Red-top (*Agrostis alba* L.). Throughout the state in the wild form, and also cultivated as a valuable hay grass.

130. Rough Red-top (*Agrostis asperifolia* Trin.). Central and western Nebraska.
131. Tickle Grass (*Agrostis hyemalis* (Walt.) B. S. P.). Everywhere, as a weedy, worthless grass.


133. Indian Reed-grass (*Cinna arundinacea* L.). In the eastern half of the state.


135. Marsh Foxtail (*Alopecurus geniculatus* L.). Occasionally found on wet lands in all parts of the state.

136. Timothy (*Phleum pratense* L.). A commonly cultivated grass, which has also escaped from cultivation in all parts of the state.

137. Little Mountain Rice (*Oryzopsis micrantha* (Tr. & Rupr.) Thurb.). In the northern and northwestern counties.

138. Big Mountain Rice (*Eriocoma cuspidata* Nutt.). In the sandhills and foothills.

139. Meadow Grass (*Muhlenbergia mexicana* (L.) Trin.). Widely distributed.

140. Muhlenberg's Grass (*Muhlenbergia racemosa* (Mx.) B. S. P.). A common wild grass found throughout the state. It is worthy of careful trial as a hay producing grass.

141. Wood Grass (*Muhlenbergia sylvatica* Torr.). This grass is reported as occurring in Nebraska (Britton's Manual), but I have seen no authentic specimens.

142. Slender Muhlenberg's Grass (*Muhlenbergia tenuiflora* (Willd.) B. S. P.). According to the range given in Britton's Manual ("Massachusetts to southern Ontario and Minnesota, south to Alabama and Texas") this species must occur in Nebraska, but I have seen no authentic specimens.


145. Brachyelytrum (*Brachyelytrum erectum* (Schreb.) Beauv.). Eastern Nebraska.

146. Short-bearded Porcupine Grass (*Stipa viridula* Trin.). Western Nebraska.

147. Slender Porcupine Grass (*Stipa comata* Trin.). In the western half of the state.


149. Poverty Grass (*Aristida dichotoma* Mx.). Reported for Nebraska (Britton's Manual), but I have seen no authentic specimens.
150. Tufted Beard Grass (*Aristida bastranea* Engelm.). Northern, central and western Nebraska.


152. Endler’s Beard Grass (*Aristida endleriana* Steud.). Northern Nebraska.

153. Purple Beard Grass (*Aristida longiseta* Steud.). Throughout the state.

154. Prairie Beard Grass (*Aristida oligantha* Mx.). In the eastern half of the state.

155. Slender Beard Grass (*Aristida gracilis* Ell.). Northern Nebraska.

156. Jointed Beard Grass (*Aristida tuberculosa* Nutt.). Central Nebraska.

**Tribe VI.—Phalarideae.—The Canary Grasses.**

This small tribe of about sixty species, more than half of which are natives of Australia and North Africa, is characterized by one-flowered spikelets, which have four empty glumes. We have but one native and two cultivated species in Nebraska.


158. Canary Grass (*Phalaris canariensis* L.). An Old World species which has become widely distributed in the state.


**Tribe VII.—Oryzeae.—The Rice Grasses.**

This is another small tribe, including about thirty-five species widely distributed in all parts of the world, and characterized by laterally compressed, one-flowered spikelets. We have three species, all indigenous.


161. Rice Cut-grass (*Homalocenchrus oryzoides* (L.) Pall.). Throughout the state.

162. Wild Rice (*Zizania aquatica* L.). In ponds and slow streams, eastern and central Nebraska.

**Tribe VIII.—Paniceae.—The Millet Grasses.**

This large tribe contains between six and seven hundred species, widely distributed throughout tropical and the warmer temperate climates. The spikelets are one-flowered, and the empty glumes very unequal and of hard texture. We have twenty-seven species, of which seventeen are indigenous.
163. Old Witch Grass (*Panicum capillare* L.). An annoying weed found in all parts of the state.

164. Diffuse Panic Grass (*Panicum cognatum* Schultes). According to the range given for this species in *Britton’s Manual* (“Illinois to Georgia and Florida, west to Minnesota, Missouri and Arizona”) it should be found in eastern Nebraska, but I have seen no authentic specimens.

165. Sprouting Crab Grass (*Panicum proliferum* Lam.). Eastern Nebraska.

166. Switch Grass (*Panicum virgatum* L.). A tall, stout grass, growing throughout the state.


169. Elongated Panic Grass (*Panicum perlongum* Nash). The range given for this species in *Britton’s Manual* (“Ill. to S. Dak. and the Indian Territory”) indicates that it should be found in Nebraska, but I have no authentic specimens.

170. Small Panic Grass (*Panicum dichotomum* L.). Specimens from eastern and central Nebraska have been somewhat doubtfully referred to this species.

171. Indian Millet (*Panicum miliaceum* L.). This oldest of all millets, and one of the oldest of all cereals, is frequently grown as a forage plant. It is supposed to be a native of India, where it is still grown for human food.


175. Scribner’s Panic Grass (*Panicum scribnerianum* Nash). Widely distributed throughout the state.


177. Porter’s Panic Grass (*Panicum porterianum* Nash). According to the range given for this species in *Britton’s Manual* (“Maine and Ontario to Minnesota, South to Florida, and Texas”) it should be found in Nebraska, but I have seen no authentic specimens.

178. Barnyard Grass (*Echinochloa crus-galli* (L.) Beauv.). An introduced weedy grass, now found in all parts of the state. It might be made a valuable annual forage plant like the common millet.
179. Small Crab-grass (*Syntherisina linearis* (Krock) Nash.) Northern Nebraska.
180. Large Crab-grass (*Syntherisina sanguinalis* (L.) Dulac). An introduced annual weed in the eastern half of the state.
181. Dotted millet (*Eriochloa punctata* (L.) W. Hamilt.). Said to occur in Nebraska (*Britton's Manual*), but I have seen no authentic specimens.
182. Bead-grass (*Paspalum setaceum* Mx.). Eastern, central, and northern Nebraska.
186. Yellow Foxtail (*Chaetochloa glauca* (L.) Scribner). A common Old World weed in the eastern half of Nebraska.
188. Italian Millet (*Chaetochloa italic* (L.) Kunth). Widely grown as a forage plant under the names “German Millet,” “Golden Millet,” “Hungarian Grass,” etc.

**Tribe IX.—Andropogoneae.—The Cane Grasses.**

This large tribe of mostly large grasses is characterized by a spiked inflorescence in which the flowers are perfect or at least not separated, and frequently solid stems. We have seven species, of which five are indigenous.

191. Sorghum (*Sorghum vulgare* Pers.). Much grown in many parts of the state. It includes Chinese Sugar Cane, Broom Corn, Kaffir Corn, Millo Maize, Durra, etc.
193. Little Blue-stem (*Andropogon scoparius* Mx.). Throughout the state.
194. Big Blue-stem (*Andropogon furcatus* Muhl.). Throughout the state.
TRIBE X.—Maydeae.—The Maize Grasses.

This small tribe of a dozen or so species has spiked inflorescences in which the staminate and pistillate spikelets are separated, and the stems are solid. Of our four species, but one is indigenous.

197. Job's Tears (*Coix lachryma* L.). This odd grass is frequently grown in gardens as an ornamental plant.

198. Gama Grass (*Tripsacum dactyloides* L.). This large grass grows in wet places in eastern Nebraska.

199. Teosinte (*Euchlaena mexicana* Schrader). Occasionally grown experimentally. It resembles Indian Corn very closely.

200. Maize (*Zea mays* L.). The common Indian corn is one of the most widely grown of the large grasses.

SUMMARY.

It is interesting to note that of the one hundred and fifty indigenous species listed above, fully one hundred and thirty have more or less value for forage, while twenty are to be regarded as weeds. Of the fifty species which have been introduced ten are cereals, twenty forage plants, fourteen weeds, while six are grown solely for ornamental purposes. Adding the indigenous and introduced species we find that no less than one hundred and fifty possess value as forage plants, ten yield cereals, six are grown for ornamental uses, while thirty-four are more or less troublesome weeds.

Tabulating these facts by tribes we obtain the following results:

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<th>Tribes</th>
<th>Forage</th>
<th>Cereals</th>
<th>Weeds</th>
<th>Ornaments</th>
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<td>I. Fescue Grasses.</td>
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<tr>
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<td>2</td>
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<tr>
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<td>8</td>
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<td>III. Grama Grasses.</td>
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<td>1</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td>VII. Rice Grasses.</td>
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### Tribes

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