

*Bouteloua gracilis*

[Synonyms : *Actinochloa gracilis*, *Atheropogon gracilis*, *Atheropogon oligostachya*, *Bouteloua gracilis* var. *gracilis*, *Bouteloua gracilis* var. *major*, *Bouteloua gracilis* var. *stricta*, *Bouteloua major*, *Bouteloua oligostachya*, *Bouteloua oligostachya* var. *intermedia*, *Bouteloua oligostachya* var. *major*, *Bouteloua oligostachya* var. *pallida*, *Bouteloua stricta*, *Chondrosium gracile*, *Chondrosium gracile* var. *polystachyum*, *Chondrosium oligostachyum*, *Chondrosium gracile*, *Chondrosium gracilis*, *Chondrosium gracile* var. *gracile*, *Chondrosium gracile* var. *polystachyum*, *Chondrosium oligostachyum*, *Eutriana gracilis*, *Eutriana oligostachya*]

**BLUE GRAMA** is a semi-evergreen grass. Native to North America it has brown or grey flower spikelets.

It is also known as Buffalo grass, Mesquite grass, *Mesquiteheinä* (Finnish), Mosquito grass, and Signal-arm grass.

*Gracilis* is Latin (slender, graceful, thin, slim).

Valued particularly for its drought resistance, blue grama was familiar to many North American Indian tribes. Some of the Apache Indians used the seeds to make a porridge-like mush, and they also ground the seeds for breadflour.

Records show that the Hopi tribe in Arizona, some of the Navajo Indians and the Keresan, and Montana Indian tribes all used it for forage for their animals.

The Hopi used the grass for basketmaking. On the other hand the Zuni in western New Mexico made a hair brush by using the severed end of a firmly bound bunch of grass – and according to authorities the opposite end of the bunch served as a broom or goats' milk strainer.

According to some records blue grama provided a cash crop for Apache Indians, and in a less pragmatic capacity it performed a significant role in some of the Navajo tribe's ritual Squaw Dance.

The appearance of the grass was significant for two tribes at least. The Dakota tribe viewed it a little as some of us see the four-leaved clover (*Trifolium repens*) today. We often search for this and look at any with fewer leaves askance. The Dakota similarly sought out 3-spiked plants as opposed to the more common two-spiked ones. The emergence of the fruit spikes on the grass was a signal of Winter for the Montana Indian tribe and, in the same way that many of us note a sparsity or abundance of Autumn berries, the tribe also considered a predominance of 1-spiked grasses indicated a mild Winter to come whereas a proliferation of more spikes meant that a severe Winter was on the horizon.

For the Navajo tribe chewed blue grama roots provided a medicine for their horses. This mush was smeared on the incisions made when a colt was castrated.

The Navajo tribe also found the grass of medicinal benefit for themselves as the chewed roots were applied to their own cuts, and a plant decoction was used to treat some female disorders.

Today blue grama provides forage on a commercial scale.