

'Reeve' Beach Wildrye

Leymus mollis (*Elymus mollis*)

**Uses: Revegetation and Erosion Control
by Seed
in Coastal Alaska**



Background Information

Beach wildrye grows wild in Alaska mainly along the coast on sandy beaches.

Beach wildrye has many different common names. It is also known by several different scientific names. Current synonyms are *Elymus mollis* or *Elymus arenarius*. In describing this specific cultivar, *Leymus mollis* is the most up to date name. Beach wildrye also has several subspecies and varieties.



Map from Hultén, 1968.
Used with the permission of Stanford University

Distribution

Beach wildrye is found on sandy beaches, spits, sea beaches, tidal flats, sea cliffs, and lakeshores from Alaska to Greenland and south to New York and central California (Welsh, 1974).

Growth

Beach wildrye is easy to recognize in the wild. Its spike of seed/flowers is large and compact. The vigorous rhizomes are the main way this grass spreads.

It is perennial, with stout stems that are smooth beneath the spike. It is sod-forming, growing to about 4 feet high, with many leaves overlapping at the base (Wright, 1991a). The blue color of its leaves is distinctive.

Cultivar: 'Reeve'

Plant Introduction Number: 572569

'Reeve' beach wildrye can produce commercially viable amounts of seed (compared to wild beach wildrye and to the cultivar 'Benson' wildrye).

The original collection for 'Reeve' was from Norway. 'Reeve' meets the need for a wildrye that would produce seed.

The Alaska Plant Materials Center began evaluating this cultivar in 1979. With 'Reeve's' ability to produce seed for coastal area revegetation, it was released in 1991 (Wright, 1991a).

'Reeve' Beach Wildrye is recognized in breeder, foundation, registered, and certified seed classes.

Breeder and foundation seed is maintained by the Alaska Plant Materials Center.

Registered and certified seed is available through the Alaska Seed Growers, Inc.

Historical Uses

Klebesadel (1985) stated that beach wildrye was used for forage in Alaska. Native Peoples used it for thatching for shelters, basketry, food, and cordage.

Alaska Plant Materials Center

Serving Alaska's needs in production of Alaska native plants

July 23, 2007



'Reeve' Beach Wildrye

'Reeve' Beach Wildrye for Alaska Revegetation Purposes

Beach wildrye grows throughout the coasts of Alaska. Thus, for revegetation in sandy or gravelly places, it makes sense to use a species that might naturally occur. The native beach wildrye does not form viable seed. Use the cultivar 'Reeve' for places that need seed.

'Reeve' provides good erosion control because of its aggressive rhizomes and roots. It can successfully revegetate areas unsuitable for other species. Prior planning is essential.

'Reeve' Peculiarities

Beach wildrye does poorly in organic, silt, or clay soils. It does not tolerate excessive foot traffic. It also does not compete well with other grasses (Wright, 1994).



'Reeve' beach wildrye seed
~33,000 seeds per pound

To Produce 'Reeve' beach wildrye

- 'Reeve' produces seed three years after the first planting.
- 'Reeve' does not decline in production over time.
- Poor seedling vigor occurs if there is not enough sand in the soil.
- Weed control is important for beach wildrye seedlings to become large enough to out-compete weeds.
- Beach wildrye responds well to high nitrogen fertilizers (Wright, 1994).

Peggy Hunt & Stoney Wright
State of Alaska
Department of Natural Resources
Division of Agriculture
Plant Materials Center
5310 S. Bodenburg Spur Rd.
Palmer, AK 99645-9706
Phone: (907) 745-4469



Plant by seed, not sprigs!



'Reeve' beach wildrye production field at the Plant Materials Center in Palmer, Alaska.

'Reeve' beach wildrye is a beautiful landscape plant.

With its distinctive blue coloration, 'Reeve' makes a barren, sandy, or gravelly place look beautiful. Its plumes are beige when ripe.

'Reeve' will hold the soil in place for many years because of its spreading, tenacious rhizomes.

References

- Hultén, E. 1968. *Flora of Alaska and Neighboring Territories*. © by the Board of Trustees of the Leland Stanford Jr. University, Stanford University Press, Stanford.
- Klebesadel, L.J. 1985. *Beach Wildrye Characteristics and uses of a Native Alaskan Grass of Uniquely Coastal Distribution*. *Agroborealis*, 17: 31-38.
- Welsh, S.L. 1974. *Anderson's Flora of Alaska and Adjacent Parts of Canada*. Brigham Young University Press, Provo, Utah.
- Wright, S.J. 1991a. *Release Notice—'Reeve' Beach Wildrye*. State of Alaska, Division of Agriculture, Plant Materials Center.
- Wright, S.J. 1994. *Beach Wildrye Planting Guide for Alaska*. State of Alaska, Division of Agriculture, Plant Materials Center.