



'Benson' Beach Wildrye

Leymus mollis (*Elymus mollis*)

Uses: Revegetation by Sprigs in Coastal Alaska

Background Information

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

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 Press.

Distribution

Find Beach Wildrye 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).

'Benson' 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.

Growth

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

It is perennial, with stout stems that are slightly hairy beneath the spike. It is sod-forming, growing nearly 4 ft. high, with many leaves overlapping at the base (Wright, 1991b). Leaf color is green.

Cultivar: 'Benson'

Plant introduction number: 567896

'Benson' was released by the Alaska Plant Materials Center in 1991 (Wright, 1991b).

The parental seed for 'Benson' was collected in 1980 from Kodiak Island, Alaska.

This cultivar provides rapid recolonization of critical coastal areas where natural erosion would prevent traditional seeding methods.

Plant 'Benson' for commercial production of sprigs—i.e. only for vegetative reproduction (Wright, 1993).



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

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'Benson' Beach Wildrye for Alaska Revegetation Purposes

Throughout the coasts of Alaska, beach wildrye can be found. Thus, for revegetation in sandy or gravelly places, it makes sense to use a species that might naturally occur. 'Benson' sprigs effectively and quickly recolonizes extreme but important coastal areas especially where there are dunes and blowing sand conditions.

'Benson' provides good erosion control because of its aggressive vegetative growth. It can successfully revegetate areas unsuitable for other species. Prior planning is essential.

'Benson' Peculiarities

Beach wildrye works best in sandy or gravelly soils—but 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).

'Benson' beach wildrye does not produce well by seed. It does produce seed, but most of the head is empty.



'Benson' seed



'Benson' Beach Wildrye production at the Plant Materials Center in Palmer, Alaska.

**'Benson' Beach Wildrye is a sand-binder.
Transplanting has been both practical and successful.**

To Produce 'Benson' Beach Wildrye

- Typical transplanting equipment and potato harvester (or hand tools) are needed.
- 'Benson' does not decline in production over time.
- Poor seedling vigor occurs if there is not enough sand in the soil.
- Beach wildrye responds well to high nitrogen fertilizers (Wright, 1994).



**Plant as sprigs,
not seed!**

References

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