

# Meadow Dropseed

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Meadow dropseed is a native warm-season perennial bunchgrass that grows in large tufts with an erect or spreading growth habit. Leaf blades are flat and narrow, mostly 1 to 2 mm wide and up to 24 inches long ending with a tapering tip. If you picture the diameter of old-fashioned baling wire, then you will know the size of these skinny leaves. The leaf blade rolls inward as blade matures giving a wiry look to the pointed leaves. Leaf sheath is shorter than the internodes of the stems with upper sheath inflated and enclosing the seedhead. Ligule is a very short membrane with fine eyelash-like hairs. Beginning in October the 3 to 8 inches long seedhead emerges from the upper leaf sheath.

Like most dropseed species, meadow dropseed provides only fair to poor grazing for all classes of livestock and poor value for deer. The best grazing is during the early spring when growth is tender. Here is a trick I often show folks when talking about plants out on the land. I pick the stoutest-looking person in the group and tell them they are to graze like a cow by wrapping their fingers around the leaves of meadow dropseed, the same way a cow wraps her tongue around the leaves, and to pull. Normally this stunt will not fail to show how tough and wiry this grass can be, try it and see if you can pull the grass as would a cow. In the event it does pull loose from the plant I then ask them to take the bundle of leaves in two hands and attempt to pull the leaves apart. In most cases the strain on their faces and muscles in the arms is plainly evident. Meadow dropseed may grow as scattered individual plants or in small monocultures but rarely occupies much land area. A benefit to this grass is its deep root system that reduces soil erosion where it grows. Quail occasionally eat the seeds, and the grass provides good cover for ground-nesting birds.

Management wise, pastures that are repeatedly grazed during the summer will show an increased amount of meadow dropseed due to animal preference for more palatable grasses while avoiding this tough wiry grass. Rotational grazing will ensure that all grasses receive use and will minimize selective grazing of the more palatable grasses. This species is best adapted to clay soils that receive extra runoff, and it can be found on open prairies to pastures with scattered brush. Meadow dropseed can be found across all of Texas with the exception of the far western Trans Pecos and the High Plains region.

So here we have a grass that is not readily grazed most of the year but in most pastures does not increase in ground area it covers, so is it a good grass or not? While you wouldn't want an entire pasture of meadow dropseed, it does provide shade to keep the soil cooler during hot, dry summer months. It is somewhat resistant to shredding with a tractor as I witnessed along a dirt road in Baylor county this summer. Each side of this one-lane road had been shredded, perhaps to thin back the bountiful crop of annual broomweed, but what caught my attention were the shredded, and I do mean shredded leaf blades of meadow dropseed that were cut off and split into hair-like strands. I'm sure this grass would bog down a shredder when in thick stands of meadow dropseed. Not all plants are created equal, but they all have a place on the land. Now is an excellent time to observe if you have meadow dropseed on your place and how frequent it appears. Bend down and wrap two fingers around a mouth full of this grass and give it a tug. See what I mean?

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Photo Captions:

1 Meadow dropseed in full growth during the fall of the year.



2 Seedhead of meadow dropseed emerging from the sheath in October and November.



3 A thick stand of meadow dropseed reduces erosion and keeps soil surface cooler.



4 Long, thin and wiry leaves grow outward from the base of meadow dropseed.



5 Meadow dropseed that survived a mowing which left the leaves shredded.

