

# Sideoats Grama

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Hopefully you are very familiar with this month's Range Plants feature and see it regularly upon your land. Sideoats grama, *Bouteloua curtipendula*, can be widely found in most counties and in all vegetational regions of Texas. Sideoats grama was officially adopted as the state grass of Texas by the Legislature in 1971. There are two distinct forms of sideoats: a rhizomatous and colony forming variety and an individual bunchgrass variety. The bunchgrass variety is the taller of the two and will reach 12 to 36 inches in height and reproduces by seeds, while the rhizomatous variety reaches 8 to 14 inches and reproduces by rhizomes as well as seeds. The leaf and stem color of both varieties are bluish-green when growing and mature to a reddish color with curly leaves. The leaves are flat with hairs on the lower edge of the margins originating from small, pimple-like bumps. The leaves are up to ¼-inch wide and 4 to 8 inches long and grow in a curved shape. Leaf sheaths are rounded, without hairs and usually shorter than the internodes. Ligule is a short, dense fringe of hairs. Seedhead is a zigzagged rachis, 3 to 15 inches long with 20 to 60 spikelets lining up on one side of the seedhead, resembling oats. There are old reports that early settlers arriving in Texas saw a grass with seeds that resembled the seeds of oats hanging on the side of the stem. They decided to call this new grass Sideoats and the name stuck. Sideoats grama will produce seed up to two or three times per year depending on rainfall with seed production extending from May until November.

Sideoats grama provides palatable and nutritious forage readily eaten by all classes of livestock. While it produces less weight in forage than many of the tall grasses, what it does produce is desirable. Crude protein values range from 11 percent during spring green-up, decreasing to 5 to 8 percent in summer, and down to 3.5 to 4.5 percent in winter. Sideoats grama cures well for use as winter forage by livestock. Forage value for wildlife is poor, though deer eat early spring green leaves, and turkeys strip seeds from the seedheads. Larger clumps of this grass are used for nest cover by quail and other grassland birds.

Because of its palatability, sideoats grama is easily overused unless good grazing management is practiced, including rotational grazing, proper grazing use, and proper stocking rates. Seed is commercially available and is frequently used in range seeding of old cropland fields and following brush management on rangeland areas. The most used variety of sideoats available commercially is called "Haskell" and is adapted for all of Texas. This variety was originally collected in Haskell County by NRCS employees, put into testing and later released from the Bud E. Smith NRCS Plant Materials Center located north of Knox City, Texas. It grows on all soil types but does best on calcareous and moderately alkaline soils. A new variety called South Texas germplasm Sideoats grama fits the extreme south Texas area primarily west, south and east of San Antonio. What is not to like about a grass that grows in almost every county in Texas, provides very good forage values for livestock and whose seeds feed game and songbirds. It is no surprise that the state of Texas recognized this wonderful native as the state grass of the great state of Texas.

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Photo Captions:

1 Sideoats grama is a mid-height grass that offers excellent forage value.



2 A happy sight for livestock with green grass adjacent to fresh water, sideoats grows on a variety of soil types.



3 In Latin *curtipendula* means shortened and pendulous, accurately describing the seeds



4 Mid-summer growth reveals orange flowers emerging from the developing seeds.



5 A late summer look at a mature sideoats plant with excellent seed crop.



6 A view of the rhizomatous variety of sideoats grama, note the carpet forming growth habit.

