

Native Grasses, Sedges and Rush for the Garden, Part VI

And finally, the last of this series on native grasses and grass-like plants for the garden. I am hoping to add more in the future, including blue-eyed grass, bulbs, and other true grasses such as melic grass (*Melica imperfecta*), giant needlegrass (*Achnatherum coronatum*), and cane bluestem (*Bothriochloa barbinodis*).

Blue grama grass (*Bouteloua gracilis*) is medium to small-sized, warm season grass. It spreads slowly, forming a green-gray groundcover that requires little water.

From [Grass_090618](#)

October 8, 2006 in Sunland garden.

From [Grass_090618](#)

April 5, 2005. Blue grama and buffalo grass form a small lawn in Sunland garden.

From [Grass_090618](#)

September 20, 2007 with needlegrass. Notice the distinctive "eye-lash" inflorescence.

From [Grass_090618](#)

The one question I get over and over again is: "Can you suggest a native plant that can be used as a lawn-substitute?" I know that we could have a long blog-dialogue on this very question, but my answer is - no. There are natives that will mimic the manufactured turf grasses that have come to dominate our yards, but none is quite as tough and green as these. My question is: why? If you just want a green, meadowy look, clustered field sedge (*Carex praegracilis*) probably comes close, though it will need additional water and possibly nitrogen to keep it very green. It can take some traffic, but nothing like St. Augustine. In any event, whether you go with sedge, buffalo grass (native to the southwest but not to CA), or blue grama grass, this is not a low-maintenance endeavor. As the meadow is getting established you will have to do quite a bit of hand weeding. A lush green look will require supplemental water and possibly nitrogen. My philosophy is to reduce the lawn area to a minimum and go with the common grasses (but never, ever, ever, ever use Bermuda!!!!) that the turf industry has created.

Having said all of this, check out this [blog](#) for a discussion of the new [UC Verde](#) (a Univ. of Calif. buffalo grass selection).

On to sedge...

From [Grass_090618](#)

August 2008, Rancho Santa Ana Botanic Garden, riparian area.

From [Grass_090618](#)

February 2009, Rancho Santa Ana Botanic Garden, riparian area, still green, but it does get watered.

From [Grass_090618](#)

September 21, 2007, trial patch in Pasadena garden. Gardener bought 1 gallon pots and divided them into about 4 plugs each.

From [Grass_090618](#)

April 13, 2009, [Santa Barbara Botanic Garden](#) home demonstration garden.

From [Grass_090618](#)

Creeping red fescue is another native grass suggested as a lawn substitute. From the above blog ([Eden Makers Blog](#)) we know there is at least one person for whom this was not successful. One of the people who attended my recent talk for the [OC-CNPS](#), also was not successful with this grass. The selection 'Molate' is supposed to take more drought and heat, but still it requires some irrigation and some shade in Southern California.

From [Grass_090618](#)

April 12, 2006, Pasadena garden.

From [Grass_090618](#)

August 25, 2005, LaCanada garden.

From [Grass_090618](#)

And finally, just some pictures of gardens with grasses and grass-like natives.

From [Grass_090618](#)

May 25, 2009. Local Mom uses child's scooter on trip home from school. Most of the grasses have been cut back now that they have gone dormant.

From [Grass_090618](#)

April 14, 2009. Dried grass flower arrangement.

From [Grass_090618](#)

July 14, 2005. Riparian woodland garden with California fescue, and Carman's Gray rush, along with California rose, fuchsia flowering gooseberry, Claremont currant, western columbine, San Diego sedge, toyon and monardella.

From [Grass_090618](#)

November 30, 2005, parkway is tidy and subdued from summer to spring.

From [Grass_090618](#)

April 2007. Lovely Claremont garden that has filled in tremendously in two short years.

From [Grass_090618](#)

April 2005. Newly planted native garden, with proper spacing. Canyon Prince rye grass, Pigeon Point coyote brush, and deergrass are a few of the natives in this dry streambed garden.

From [Grass_090618](#)

April 2009. Santa Barbara Botanic garden, wet meadow.

From [Grass_090618](#)

April 2009. Dry grassland garden at Santa Barbara Botanic Garden.

From [Grass_090618](#)

Though native grasses are not extensively used, non-native grasses are very popular. Some are extremely invasive and should never be introduced into any garden. Fortunately there are native alternatives that are every bit as beautiful.

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From [Grass_090618](#)

From [Grass_090618](#)

Minimize turf grass to save water and garden sustainably.

From [Grass_090618](#)

But Milo does love his little patch of green grass carpet!

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