

## **BUFFALOGRASS**

### *Buchloe dactyloides* (Nutt.) Engelm.

Plant Symbol = BUDA

Contributed by: USDA NRCS Plant Materials Program



Hitchcock 1950  
Manual of the Grasses of the U.S.

#### **Alternate Names**

*Bouteloua dactyloides* (Nutt.) J.T. Columbus

#### **Uses**

**Erosion control:** Buffalograss can be used on areas that do not receive a lot of rain but are affected by wind erosion, such as roadside cuts.

**Recreation and beautification:** This grass can be used in parks and on school grounds, golf course roughs, and open lawns.

**Livestock:** This is an important pasture grass for native and introduced animals.

#### **Status**

Please consult the PLANTS Web site and your State Department of Natural Resources for this plant's current status (e.g. threatened or endangered species, state noxious status, and wetland indicator values).

#### **Description**

*Buchloe dactyloides* (Nutt.) Engelm., buffalograss, is a perennial, native, low-growing, warm-season grass. Leaf blades are 10 to 12 inches long, but they fall over and give the turf a short appearance. Staminate plants have 2 to 3 flag-like, one-sided spikes on a seedstalk 4 to 6 inches long. Spikelets, usually 10, are 1/8 inch long in two rows on one side of the rachis. Pistillate spikelets are in a short spike or head and included in the inflated sheaths of the upper leaves. Both male and female plants have stolons from several inches to several feet in length, internodes 2 to 3 inches long, and nodes with tufts of short leaves.

#### **Adaptation and Distribution**

This grass occurs naturally and grows best on clay loam to clay soils. It requires little mowing to achieve a uniform appearance. It has a low fertility requirement and it often will maintain good density without supplemental fertilization. Buffalograss is well suited for sites with 10 to 25 inches of annual precipitation. It is not adapted to shaded sites.

Buffalograss is distributed throughout the Midwest. For a current distribution map, please consult the Plant Profile page for this species on the PLANTS Website.

#### **Establishment**

Buffalograss is propagated by seed and vegetatively. Establishment can be accomplished by seeding, solid sodding, or sprigging rooted and unrooted plugs. If seeds are used, drill at 1/2 inch deep and provide firm contact between the seed and moist soil. The seed may also be broadcast. When broadcasting seed, harrow or rake the area in two directions immediately after seeding to work the seeds into the soil. Broadcast seed must be covered with soil for the seeding to be successful. With any method, the soil must be firmed against the seed. Seedlings begin to appear 14 to 21 days after planting when moisture is available for germination. The amount of seed needed to ensure a stand at the end of the first year will depend on the method of seeding, the quality of seedbed preparation, the availability of water for

establishment, and certain climatic uncertainties. All planting should be delayed until the danger of frost has past. The time of planting depends upon the latitude of the location, and may extend to August 1 in lower latitudes.

Buffalograss can be established from pieces of sod or sod plugs. Sod should be planted on a well prepared seedbed in 18-inch rows. Sod should be spaced from 6 inches to 2 feet apart; plugs should be planted on 12 to 24 inch centers depending on how quickly a complete cover is desired. When planting, dig a hole deep enough to set a plant in with the grass blades above the ground. Pack soil around the sod making sure not to cover with soil because the plant will die. Once planted, the sod should be watered for about 3 weeks to ensure root establishment.

Sprigs should be planted into soil that has been tilled to a depth of 4 to 6 inches. Sprigging rate should be approximately 240 bushels of sprigs per acre, planted to a depth of 1 inch or less. A planted site should be rolled to ensure good sprig-soil contact and irrigated within 3 hours after planting. Newly planted areas will also require irrigation for several weeks to maintain a moist environment for root establishment.

Proper seedbed preparation for planting a home lawn is essential. Buffalograss will grow on heavy and compacted soils, but it is easier to start and maintain on good loam soils. Heavy soils may be improved by applying good quality organic matter such as peat moss, aged manure, or compost. Applying a phosphorus fertilizer stimulates seedling root growth, even on soils testing high in phosphorus. Work the soil to a depth of 4 to 6 inches. This may require plowing, discing, or tilling. The seedbed should be uniform, friable, and well-packed. Use tillage methods to control any weeds that may develop before seeding.

### **Management**

Buffalograss is only recommended for low maintenance and low use turfgrass areas. Mowing height and frequency depend on grass use, amount of irrigation, and time of year. Care must be taken when mowing not to cut shorter than 2 to 3 inches to avoid other grasses from out-competing the buffalograss. Buffalograss responds well to light applications of nitrogen. Over-fertilization will promote undesirable grasses within the planted area. Buffalograss is excellent for people who want a large, attractive lawn during the summer with a minimum of work involved. Other advantages of buffalograss for lawns is that it withstands heavy usage and has good drought tolerance. However, potential lawn

growers should note that buffalograss is a warm-season grass, it turns brown with fall's first freezing weather, and will not green-up until warm weather returns; it will be brown and unattractive when the neighbor's Kentucky Bluegrass is brilliant green. During extended dry periods in the summer months, buffalograss will go brown and become dormant if no supplemental water is provided. Because of aggressive runners, buffalograss can require edging along walks, driveway, and flower beds.

### **Pests and Potential Problems**

Buffalograss has no serious pests.

### **Cultivars, Improved, and Selected Materials (and area of origin)**

'Bison', 'Plains', 'Texoka', and 'Topgun' (cultivars); Bismarck Ecotype (selected class release). Seeds are available at most Midwestern commercial seed sources. Sod, sod plugs, and sprigs can be obtained from sod farms.

### **Prepared By & Species Coordinator:**

*USDA NRCS Plant Materials Program*

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For more information about this and other plants, please contact your local NRCS field office or Conservation District, and visit the PLANTS Web site <<http://plants.usda.gov>> or the Plant Materials Program Web site <<http://Plant-Materials.nrcs.usda.gov>>

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