

NATIVE GRASSES

Native grasses are not as common as they were in ages past, but they are still valued as food for native animals, as well as for habitat for a wide variety of species. These plants also enrich the soil, prevent erosion and provide an environment for seedlings of many native trees, shrubs, and wildflowers.

Sometimes the differences between grasses is subtle, so look closely for these plants in the Livermore Area Recreation and Park District's regional parks and preserves. You will learn to appreciate the beauty of our graceful and valuable native grasses.

Purple Needlegrass
Nassella pulchra

Nassella pulchra is known as California's state grass because it has adapted to grow in so many habitats, and in most types of soil. It is a long-lived perennial, maturing to heights of 12 to 40 inches. It forms dense tufts, with graceful nodding leaf blades which can be smooth or finely hairy. Also known as purple stipa, it flowers during April and May.



Nodding Needlegrass
Nassella cernua

Nodding needlegrass is similar to purple needlegrass, but can be distinguished by a softer, more flexible awn (the spike extending from the tip of the seed.) It has thinner, finer leaf blades, and usually has more flower spikes, blooming from late April into May. It is very drought tolerant in the summer months, despite heat and wind. With its dense root system, it can control erosion, as well as crowd out unwanted species, such as yellow star thistle.

Blue-eyed grass
Syrinchium bellum

This little plant resembles grass, but is actually a wildflower in the Iris family. It forms dense clumps of sword-shaped, silvery-green leaves from 2 to 10 inches tall, with only one blue-violet flower blooming at a time, from April until September.

Blue-eyed grass is found in open fields and meadows, especially in or near moist areas.



California brome
Bromus carinatus

This species is a perennial bunchgrass. It typically grows 18 to 36 inches tall and about one foot wide. It has drooping leaves which can be either smooth or hairy. California brome flowers from April until August, and is native to dry open areas in a wide variety of habitats.



California barley
Hordeum californicum

California barley is fast-growing and rather short-lived for a perennial grass. Its tufts form dense bunches that help it preserve moisture during the dry summers. Growing to a height of 27 to 31 inches, it flowers in early May, with purple spikelets forming seeds that will turn dry and golden, and then drop off when mature.



Blue Wildrye
Elymus glaucus



Blue wildrye is a perennial bunchgrass, often found as part of the understorey of open oak woodlands or riparian woodlands. Look for it along the streams in the Nature Area. This plant is dormant in the summer, and begins to grow in the fall, just before the winter rains begin. It is very tall, maturing at 24 to 55 inches. Then it produces its stiff upright spikes, carrying flowers that ripen between May and August. The leaves are thin and flat, about .25 to .5 inches wide.

Idaho fescue
Festuca idahoensis



Idaho fescue is a pretty grass, whose fine, folded leaves may stay green most of the year with adequate water. It is drought tolerant and is used for low maintenance natural landscapes. This perennial grows 12 to 31 inches tall, forming loose tufts. It is long-lived and is an excellent choice for ornamental gardens.

Pine bluegrass
Poa secunda ssp. *secunda*



Pine bluegrass is a low-growing perennial maturing between six and 39 inches tall. Its lower foliage is soft, and forms a mat over its extensive yet shallow root system below. It flowers in April, then begins to go dormant during the heat of the summer months. The leaf blades are very narrow and may be folded or flat.



Creeping wildrye
Leymus trichoides

Creeping wildrye is a long-lived perennial. It is tall, maturing at 18 to 51 inches, and forms rhizomes that creep and form new plants. It is fire resistant, springing back with new green shoots within a short time after a blaze. The leaves are blue-green with a rough upper surface. It flowers from May to July.

Large continuous patches of this grass can be found in the center of the park between the bike path and the winery.