

# Alternative Turf: Blue Grama



**A**re you thinking about seeding an area of your property into native grass? Would you like to cover an area with a grass that requires less water and maintenance? Blue grama is one of the best native grass options for low maintenance areas. Below is information that describes the main considerations when evaluating blue grama as an option for your yard.



## Benefits

- Blue grama is very well adapted to Colorado Springs' growing conditions. Once established, it will thrive in a wide variety of situations with little care, including sandy soil and soil with little fertility.
- It can create a reasonable cover of grass on a site with little fertilizer and supplemental water. It is very well suited for areas where little maintenance will be provided. Will work well on slopes and exposed areas.
- It will work on soil that has not been improved (no soil amendment added). Compacted soils should be tilled before planting.
- Can mow to 3-inch height every two weeks (or less), or leave unmowed (will be 10 to 16 inches tall).



## Water savings

- Blue grama saves a great deal of water, requiring about one-third to one-half the water of a traditional Kentucky bluegrass lawn.
- Requires 1 to 2 inches of water every 2 to 4 weeks in mid-summer (May through September) to maintain a good appearance. This equates to about 8 to 10 inches over the growing season. Kentucky bluegrass requires about 25 inches.
- Since winter watering is not required, you can save additional water from November through April.



Blue grama

- Requires regular watering for several weeks after planting while it forms new roots. In other words, you will not save water until the grass has grown a new root system during the first growing season.



## Don't use if ...

- You're seeking a grass that will create a thick, deep green traditional lawn. Because blue grama is a bunchgrass, it grows in stands that are lighter in color, clumpier, and less uniform than a traditional lawn. It looks more like a stand of native grass.
- The site is too shady. Blue grama requires at least six hours of full sun to grow successfully.
- The site has an elevation higher than 7,000 feet.
- Your yard experiences a lot of foot traffic. Blue grama will thin where traffic is constant or concentrated.

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## Considerations

- Weed invasion is the most common frustration with blue grama areas. Even though watering and mowing is reduced, controlling the weeds, especially during establishment, requires some work. With regular control over several growing seasons, it is possible to eventually achieve a stand where a minimal number of new weeds invade the area.
- Can survive without any watering, but may turn brown (go dormant) during extended dry spells without supplemental water.
- Greens up in mid-May, turns brown (goes dormant) in early October, so it's not green for as many months as a traditional lawn.
- Blue grama is only available as seed and is not available as sod or plugs.
- Blue grama seed is expensive compared to other lawn grass seed. However, the cost of the seed is much less than other landscape installation options, like landscape plants and mulch.
- Blue grama seed can be mixed with buffalograss seed before planting to create a thicker stand of grass, since buffalograss has the ability to fill in bare spots as a sod-forming grass. One grass species may outcompete the other over several years.



## Installation

- Best time to seed: late May to August 1. Late June to early July is ideal.
- Overhead watering is required for uniform and timely seed germination. Can be provided by a hose-end sprinkler or temporary irrigation system.
- For more information, see the Blue Grama and Buffalograss Installation for Urban Landscapes fact sheet.

**Learn more:** Call 668-8232  
or visit us online at [csu.org](http://csu.org).