

Learning about Bitter Panicum

Panicum amarum

Bitter panicum or "running beachgrass" is a warm - season grass found on sand dunes from New England to Mexico. The principal use for bitter panicum is in coastal dune erosion control and it can also be used in stabilizing other dry areas such as spoil banks, roadsides and mine spoils.

Characteristics. Bitter panicum, also known as bitter panicgrass or running beachgrass, is a perennial, warm season grass that can grow to a height of 7 feet. It has a growth habit that varies from erect to prostrate. It is a U.S. native. Bitter panicum leaves are narrow, only $\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ inch wide, and 7 to 20 inches long. The leaves are smooth and without hair and are bluish in color. Bitter panicum is a robust grass, spreading slowly from short, strong rhizomes to form open clumps.

Fruit. Bitter panicum produces small quantities of seed. It is most easily propagated by cuttings.

Geographic Range. Bitter panicum is adapted to very dry sterile sites. It can withstand periods of extended drought and is somewhat winter hardy. In the U.S., it is found from the east through the lower Midwest.



Additional Information.

- Bitter panicum can be eaten by livestock, such as goats, sheep and cattle.
- Bitter panicum can be planting in the fall with cuttings, in the late winter or spring with rooted cuttings, or in the spring with young bare root rhizomes.
- Bitter panicum will root at each node on the stem. This means that a shallow trench (6-8 inches deep) can be dug and the grass stem placed in the trench horizontally with the upper 1/3 of the shoot sticking out of the trench. The trench can be filled in with sand. The best time to plant bitter panicum in this way is from March through May.
- Bitter panicum fights beach erosion in two ways. The above ground portion of the plant slows the wind down and allows the sand to fall out of the wind and accumulate on the dune or beach. The rooted portion of the plant has an extensive root system that stabilizes and holds the sand in place.
- Native Americans made a warm tea from bitter panicum leaves to reduce fevers, especially those caused by malaria. It was also used for a variety of other ailments, including muscular cramps, cough, and dry throat. The stems were used for padding the inside of Cherokee moccasins.
- In addition to stabilizing beach and dune sand and serving as food for livestock, bitter panicum also provides habitat for song birds, water fowl and small mammals.

References:

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