

Elymus hystrix

Bottlebrush Grass

Tried and True
Native Plant Selections
for the Mid-Atlantic

This graceful plant is the most shade-tolerant native grass, and its distinctive flowering spikes and seed heads are a lovely ornamental feature, showing especially well when backlit. It naturally grows in dry woodlands and [barrens](#) mostly north of the Mason-Dixon Line.*



Grass	Foliage, Inflorescences, Seed Heads		
Height: 2–4 feet	 		
Spread: 1–1½ feet			
Bloom Color: Green			
Characteristics			
Cool-season, upright, clumping perennial grass with unbranched culms and open habit			
Alternate , strap-like, tapering, parallel- veined , 12”-long, medium green to blue/gray leaves, pubescent above, scabrous or glabrous below			
Erect 8–10”-long spikes with two spikelets per node with rough, straight awns up to almost 2” long			
Fruit (caryopsis) in summer persists into fall			
Spreads by self-seeding to form small populations	 		
Attributes			
Tolerates dry soil , drought, heavy shade, erosion, black walnut, and air pollution; no serious pests or diseases; deer seldom severely damage			
Attractive in fresh-cut floral arrangements			
Attracts birds to grain-like seeds; larval host to ~1 lepidopteran ; livestock can eat foliage before spikes form—awns** can injure animals	<th style="background-color: #f4a460;">Growing and Maintenance Tips</th> <th style="background-color: #f4a460;">Excellent Replacement for</th>	Growing and Maintenance Tips	Excellent Replacement for
Soil Requirements : Well-drained		Bambusa , Phyllostachys , & Pseudosasa spp. - Bamboo	
Light Requirements : Sun, Partial Shade, Shade		Miscanthus sinensis - Chinese Silver Grass	
Water Requirements : Dry, Moist			
Prefers dappled sun; may become dormant in heat	<p>*In the Mid-Atlantic, it is native to DC and rare in the DE Piedmont. In MD, it is found mainly in the mountains and Piedmont and is present throughout PA. In Va, it is common in the mountains and Piedmont, infrequent in the inner Coastal Plain, and rare or lacking in the outer Coastal Plain.</p> <p>**When working around <i>Elymus</i> wear eye protection to prevent injury from awns.</p>		
Cut old foliage and seed heads to ground in late winter before new growth appears			
Use en masse in lightly-shaded woodland settings			
Hardiness : USDA Zones 5a–9b			
developed by Master Gardeners of Northern Virginia, serving Arlington and Alexandria			

Images by Mary Free (middle) and Elaine Mills, Glencarlyn Garden, (top left) private garden, Arlington, VA, and (bottom left) U.S. National Arboretum