

Featured Plant:

Alkali cordgrass (*Spartina gracilis*)

Alkaline soil and water conditions, indicated by a pH greater than 7, are common in dry climates. Micronutrient and water uptake in plants are adversely affected by high alkaline concentrations. Some plants are more tolerant than others to these conditions. Alkali cordgrass (*Spartina gracilis*) is a species reported to tolerate alkaline conditions of pH ranging from 7-9.5 (PLANTS database).

Alkali cordgrass is a perennial, warm-season grass that grows along water courses, in wetlands and in wet meadows. It withstands periodic flooding and soil deposition. The species is native to the central and western US and Provinces of Canada from the Northwest Territory to central Mexico. The average height of alkali cordgrass ranges from ½ -3 ft tall. The leaves are stiff, leathery, and flat. Leaf blades are narrow (< ¼ inch). The outer edges are saw-toothed and rough to the touch. Plants have well developed, deep, whitish rhizomes. Seeds are tightly compressed on one side of each branch of the seed head. The seeds are flat with a papery outer covering. Alkali cordgrass and prairie cordgrass (*Spartina pectinata*) are closely related species and can be found growing in similar locations. Alkali cordgrass, however, is much shorter, leaves are finer and there are no awns on the seed.

The PMC is excited to learn more about this species' potential for planting on saline/alkaline sites where other species may struggle to grow. The PMC has small seed collections originating from Slope and Rolette counties in North Dakota. They will be grown and evaluated in the next few years for various characteristics including seed and biomass production, insect and disease predation, forage quality, and erosion control. *Nancy Jensen, Agronomist*

Western Sandcherry Update

Western sandcherry (*Prunus pumila* var. *besseyi*) is a native shrub that has been prized by settlers from earliest times. It usually has a large, dark purple, tasty fruit. At least 24 selections of sandcherry have been released, most from the beginning of the 20th century. Sadly, all but a few have been lost. The Bismarck Plant Materials Center has begun collecting fruit from promising sources across the northern plains to begin evaluating the plant for superior traits. We are looking for plants that grow tall, have large quantities of large, tasty fruit, and tend to live longer. So far districts, nurseries, private citizens, and PMC staff have collected 39 fruit samples from 5 states. We will collect again next season, hoping to fill geographic gaps in plant source locations. Thanks to those who are assisting with this study. *Craig Stange, Forester*

New Faces at the PMC

The PMC welcomed two new staff members in September. Julius Saylor, Office Automation Clerk, comes

to the PMC from the NRCS Area Office in Devils Lake, ND where he worked for almost 20 years. He grew up in Hebron, ND but attended ND School for the Deaf in Devils Lake and graduated in 1980. Julius continued his education at National Technical Institute of Deaf in Rochester, NY and graduated in 1983. Julius' wife, Sharon, is also an NRCS employee and works as a Soil Conservation Technician in the Mandan Field Office. Julius' step-son, Benjy, is a senior at Valley City State University and his daughter, Kelsey, attends Moorhead State University-Minnesota as a freshman. Julius' son, Matthew, works at Bartlett & West Engineers in Bismarck, but plans to pursue a bachelor's degree at Rochester Institute of Technology in New York starting this month. Julius' hobbies include fishing, hunting, camping, and spending time with his family, as well as his yellow lab, Bucky. Welcome, Julius!



Julius Saylor and Janet Tanski, new employees at the PMC

Janet Tanski, Biological Science Technician, transferred from the USDA-ARS to the PMC. Janet Caolo-Tanski was born in White Plains, NY and relocated to Fort Collins, CO in 1980. She has a BS in Biology (1979) from S.U.N.Y. College at Purchase, NY, and in Soil and Crop Sciences (1999) from Colorado State University (CSU). She also received a MA in Music/Concentration Dance (1986) and an MS in Plant Pathology (2003) from CSU. Janet worked for NRCS in Woodland Park, CO from 2004 through 2007 as a Conservation Technician and assisted the DC in administering conservation plans, conservation practices, and providing technical assistance to farmers, ranchers and landowners. In 2007, she accepted a job with the Agricultural Marketing Service as an Egg Shell Commodity Grader in Grand Junction, CO. In 2008, Janet began working in a Biological Science Technician position with the Agricultural Research Service at the National Arid Land Plant Genetic Resources Unit in Parlier, CA. Janet is married to Richard Tanski and has three sons and one grandson. Her family resides in Colorado and her interests include dance, horseback riding, hiking, photography and art. Welcome, Janet!

2012 Plant Materials Available

(see pages 2 & 3 for more information)

Available species:

- Sweetgrass, white sage, demo plantings
- Foundation seed
- No materials available for field plantings in 2012