



A Conservation Plant Released by The Natural Resources Conservation Service
Lockeford Plant Materials Center, Lockeford, California

LK 517F GERmplASM

saltgrass

Distichlis spicata (L.) Greene

LK 517f Germplasm saltgrass (*Distichlis spicata*) is a selected class germplasm released by the Lockeford Plant Materials Center in 2005.

Description

LK 517f Germplasm saltgrass is a California native, perennial, warm season rhizomatous grass that forms large colonies. The plant has narrow, coarse leaves that obtain an average height of 8.0 inches. LK517f does not set seed and is vegetatively propagated.

Source

LK 517f Germplasm was collected from a native stand near Pixley, California, at an elevation of 246 feet above sea level in May of 1982. It was evaluated in a common garden at the Lockeford Plant Materials Center against 70 other populations assembled from California. In 1993, six accessions were selected for advanced evaluations based upon vigor, growth pattern, and disease resistance to *Puccinia aristidae*, red rust. In 1993, a replicated advanced evaluation planting of the six accessions was established near Winters, California. The advanced evaluation site had clay soils and was on the side slope of an irrigation canal. In October 1994, evaluation of the accessions confirmed LK 517f Germplasm (9032700) as having overall better performance.



LK 517f Germplasm saltgrass planting at the Lockeford, CA Plant Materials Center.

Conservation Uses

Cultural significance: Saltgrass is of great cultural significance for Native American tribes in California who use the plant for harvesting salt. The leaves concentrate salt crystals and California Indians collected the salt crystals by threshing the leaf blades. This salt was used for a spice and widely traded.

Erosion control: LK517f Germplasm is suitable for erosion control, stabilization of shorelines, and riparian restoration. The grass produces an extensive rhizome system that stabilizes erodible soils and tolerates saline and alkaline habitats.

Livestock: Saltgrass may be used in livestock production as it tolerates moderate levels of grazing due to its rhizomatous habit and stays green for longer than other grasses. The forage value of the grass is fair to good.

Wildlife: Saltgrass is an important species for wildlife, providing habitat and forage for birds, mammals, and invertebrates. As a summer growing grass under the Mediterranean conditions of California, it provides important shelter and forage over the summer months when other native grasses become dormant.

Area of Adaptation and Use

LK517f Germplasm is primarily adapted to the Central Valley of California, although it can also be used in the Delta and Sierra Nevada foothills.

Establishment and Management for Conservation Plantings

Establishment should be in the late spring using rhizomes or plugs planted on one-foot centers. Rhizomes should be stored in a temperature range of 35-50° F and in 60-75% relative humidity, for up to 28 days; rhizomes must not be allowed to dry out. Rhizomes should be planted at a depth of 1-2 inches and sprout better at 77-86° F. Irrigation water should be applied the first summer to ensure good stand establishment. Saltgrass can be managed by burning between September and February every other year. Following burning, four inches of re-growth should be obtained before grazing is allowed.

Ecological Considerations

Saltgrass is grazed by both cattle and horses. It has a forage value of fair to good because it remains green when most other grasses are dry during drought periods and it is resistant to grazing and trampling. It is cropped both when green and in the dry state; however, it is most commonly used during the winter for livestock feed. LK 517f Germplasm was selected in trials at the Lockeford PMC on the basis of resistance to infection by red rust. In a further trial on clay soils in Winters, CA, LK 517f Germplasm was rated moderate for disease. Many saltgrass cultivars are highly susceptible to the fungus and act as the alternate host for the red rust that infects spinach. Although the red rust disease is difficult for shippers to detect, it grows rapidly during transit of spinach. Since little is known about this disease, there are no recommended control techniques. Saltgrass eradication in areas adjacent to spinach production fields has been the only method used so far because the pathogen cannot complete its life cycle without this alternate host plant.

Seed and Plant Production

LK517f Germplasm saltgrass does not set seed and is vegetatively propagated from rhizomes. Due to the limited viability of the rhizomes, harvest is recommended in late winter with planting on 1 ft. centers in early spring.

Availability

For seed or plant increase: Plantings of LK517f Germplasm saltgrass are maintained by the USDA-NRCS California Plant Materials Center in Lockeford, CA. Rhizomes and cuttings in limited amounts can be provided upon request.

For More Information

Lockeford Plant Materials Center, 21001 N. Elliott Road, PO Box 68, Lockeford, CA 95237. Tel: 209 727-5319. Website (www.nrcs.usda.gov/plant-materials/capmc).

Citation

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