

## GRASSES

### Ricegrass, Indian 'Rimrock'

#### *Achnatherum hymenoides* 'Rimrock'

Native. NRCS selection made near Billings, MT. A striking cool-season perennial bunchgrass. Produces an abundance of seeds spread singly throughout the plant canopy, giving an airy wavy appearance. Large dark shiny seeds can be used to make a type of flour. An excellent choice for hot, dry sites in sandy or average well-drained, full sun conditions. Grows 1-2.5 ft. tall.

**Description:** This densely tufted cool-season, perennial bunchgrass, 1 to 2 feet tall, has the grace of a winter bouquet, with broad, open panicles whose wavy branches support single-flowered Spikelets. Florets are white-hairy at the base, turning dark brown to black and shiny at maturity. The short terminal awn is deciduous. Leaves are slender and numerous, with blades to 12 inches long, ascending and spreading, flat to in-rolled, stiff, and somewhat harsh to touch.

**Distribution/Habitat:** Indian ricegrass is widely distributed on sands and sandy soils from British Columbia to Manitoba and in all states west of the Missouri River, plus northern Mexico. It is characteristically found with pinyon-juniper, sagebrush, winterfat, saltbush, blue grama, wheatgrasses, needlegrasses, and threeawns. In South Dakota it occurs as scattered plants confined to sandy, gravelly, or stony soils of the western portion. Greatest abundance is in the southwestern corner.

**Comments:** Indian ricegrass is one of the most important native forages in western deserts and semi desert ranges. Although not a principal forage in South Dakota, its appearance is so striking it can scarcely be ignored. It is excellent forage; leaves and seeds are eaten by livestock and grazing wild animals, even in winter. Mule deer are especially fond of the seeds. The seed is also favored by birds and small mammals. Western Indians made considerable use of the seeds, grinding them into flour, hence the name, Indian ricegrass.

**Credit:** James E. Johnson & Gary E. Larson, Grassland Plants of South Dakota and the Northern Great Plains. SDSU, Brookings, SD. B-566 (rev.) August 1999. Page 48.  
**Photo Credit:** SDSU Ag Experiment Station

