



# Deer Grass

**Scientific Name:** *Muhlenbergia rigens*

**Recommended Varieties:**

- *Muhlenbergia rigens*, commonly known as deergrass, is a warm season perennial bunchgrass within the Poaceae Grass Family.

**Common Pest(s):**

Deer Grass has no none pest or problems

Ethnobotany

## Growing Information

**Native Habitat**

Deergrass is a large perennial bunchgrass found in sandy or well drained soils below 7000 feet in elevation in the southwestern United States and parts of Mexico. In California, it grows primarily in the coast ranges of central and southern California, the Sierra and Cascade foothills, and the eastern part of the North Coast range.

**Ideal Planting Window**

Fall transplanting is best especially in areas with mild winters and hot summers. This allows root systems to become established through the winter before they have to deal with heat stress.

**Growing Guidance**

Deergrass is one of the most beautiful and probably the easiest to grow of all the native California bunchgrasses. It prefers sandy or gravelly soils, but does OK in almost any soil as long as it's well drained.

Calscape



## Interesting Facts

**Ethnobotanic:** Deergrass is a significant basketry material to central and southern California Native Americans who utilize the flower stalks in the foundations of coiled baskets. Frequently thousands of flower stalks are needed for completion of each basket. Culms are gathered in late spring while still green, or summer or early fall when golden brown depending upon the tribe, individual family preference and elevation of the deergrass site.

**Conservation:** Deergrass is a valuable streambank stabilizer, as it has an extensive root system, and if grown in dense enough colonies, it can be an effective weed suppresser. In California, Pacific Gas and Electric is experimenting with growing dense colonies under powerline corridors. It's long, slender culms, and tall tufts making it an attractive plant for the garden.

**Other Uses:** Uses of deergrass include streambank stabilization, landscaping, forage, insectary, weed suppressant, and wildlife.

[Usda.gov](http://Usda.gov)

Photo: Creative Commons

## Native Habitat Description

**Wildlife:** In California, dense patches of deergrass provide cover during the fawning period of mule deer (*Odocoileus hemionus*) in mountain meadows and grassland openings. The younger palatable tufts are grazed by deer, horses, and cattle and can remain palatable if continually grazed. It is particularly sought for forage by animals when first resprouting after a burn. Older tufts are poor feed for livestock. The seeds provide food for songbirds and probably other birds as well. In sunny openings where deergrass occurs, it forms a larval food plant for one of the Satyrid butterflies, the California ringlet (*Coenonympha californica*) and for the umber skipper (*Poanes melane*). Massive numbers of ladybugs overwinter in deergrass clumps.

[Usda.gov](http://Usda.gov)

## Historical Uses



Deergrass is one of California's largest and most prominent native perennial bunchgrasses, and it was prized by California Indian tribes in over half the state for its role in basket weaving.

"Down towards the base of the plant there is an elbow or notch which is where the plant is to be broken off. Run your fingers up the plant to find the notch to avoid the prickles. Use top part of plant to start your basket because it is more pliable. Remove the outer dry shell."

[Ethnobotany](http://Ethnobotany)

[Arboretum.ucsc.edu](http://Arboretum.ucsc.edu)

## Contact Information



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