

Keys to Agronomy

OCT '25

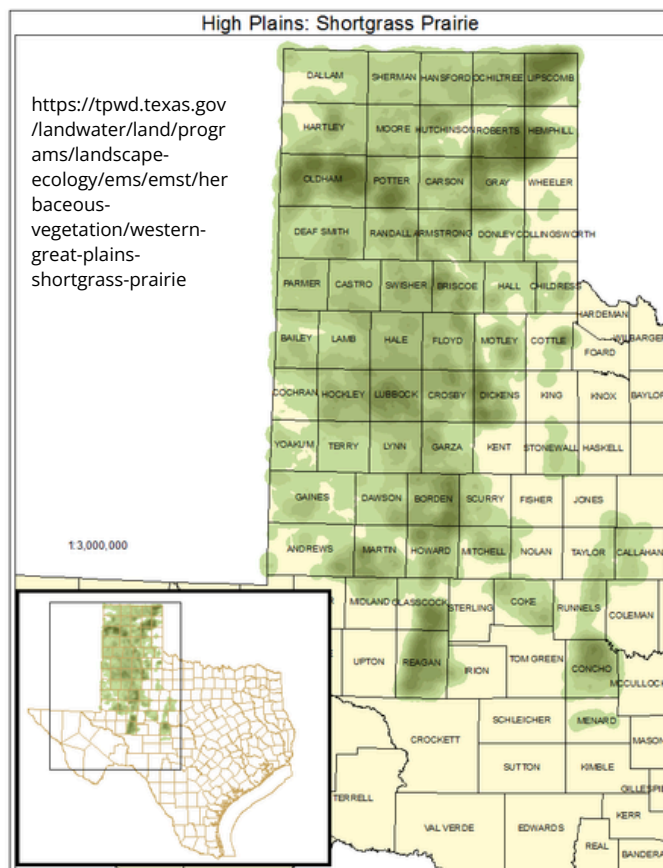
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Rooted in Resilience: Why Native Grasses Matter on the Texas High Plains

The wide-open vistas of the Texas High Plains weren't always cotton fields and center-pivots, they were once carpeted in shortgrass prairie, a hardy mix of native grasses. Today, re-establishing and managing those native grass species is one of the most practical, climate-smart investments a landowner or producer can make. Livestock and wildlife species, ecosystem processes, and overall plant community function depends on our native grasses for a variety of reasons. Let's find out what native grasses are, why they matter on the High Plains, and how they can fit into working landscapes.

What are "native grasses"?

Native grasses are perennial grass species that evolved in a particular region and are well adapted to its soils, rainfall patterns, temperature extremes, and natural disturbance regimes. On the High Plains, common native species include buffalograss and a suite of "grama" and bluestem species such as blue grama and sideoats grama. These plants are selected by nature to survive hot summers, high winds, cold snaps and low rainfall (12-21 inches average). Unlike many introduced turf or forage grasses, native species invest heavily below ground and live year after year without intensive irrigation or frequent reseeding.



Contact Me!

Got an idea, question, or comment?

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NATIVE GRASSES CONTINUED

Why they matter here: 5 practical benefits

1. Water efficiency and drought resilience. Native grasses are adapted to the semi-arid High Plains climate and typically require far less supplemental water than introduced pasture grasses or turf. That makes them a natural fit where water is a limiting resource.
2. Soil health and deep roots. Much of a native grassland's biomass is below ground; deep root systems improve soil structure, increase water infiltration, and build organic matter.
3. Erosion control and wind protection. The High Plains are prone to wind and water erosion. Native grasses bind surface soils and reduce the chance of wind-blown or water-washed topsoil loss.
4. Wildlife and biodiversity. Native grasses provide food and shelter for pollinators, songbirds, game species, and beneficial insects. Restoring native mixes can bring back plant and animal communities that improved ranch resilience historically provided.
5. Economic and management advantages. Once established, native grass stands usually need less fertilizer, fewer pesticides, and less irrigation than improved pastures. Programs such as the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) and grassland conservation options can also provide financial incentives for establishing or conserving native grasslands.

Native grasses aren't a one-size-fits-all solution, but they have many practical uses: low-input grazing pastures, buffer strips around fields to trap sediment and runoff, pollinator or wildlife corridors, and restoration of marginal or erosion-prone acres that are costly to farm. Managed correctly, native stands can provide reliable forage and long-term ground cover that reduces risk during dry years. Reconnecting a parcel of land with its native grasses is more than an ecological restoration; it's a practical strategy for building drought-resilient forage, protecting soils, improving habitat, and potentially reducing long-term input costs. For producers on the Texas High Plains, native grasses are a down-to-earth tool for both conservation and production.

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THE HOMEOWNERS HUB

Cleaning garden tools probably isn't at the top of anyone's fall to-do list, but if you skip it, your tools might soon look as scary as that collapsing pumpkin still sitting on your porch! Taking a little time now to clean, sharpen, and store them properly will save you when spring rolls around and you're ready to dig in.

Before the cold truly sets in, take advantage of these mild days to give your trusty tools some TLC. A couple of hours now means you'll be ready to hit the ground running when gardening season returns!



Hoses: Drain, Roll, and Rest

Before storing, drain out every bit of water, roll neatly, and lay flat or drape over hose supports. Leaving hoses kinked or full of water can lead to cracking and splitting over winter.



Shears, Saws, Loppers, and Pruners: Scrub, Sharpen, and Oil Up

These are your precision tools, so treat them like it! Remove sticky sap with steel wool or paint thinner (follow the directions carefully), then give them a light coat of oil to keep rust away. When sharpening, work at a 45-degree angle from the outer edge toward the center.



Sprayers and Spreaders: Triple Rinse!

Drain and rinse, rinse, rinse, yes, three times! Always read the label to properly dispose of leftover chemicals and follow cleaning directions to prevent corrosion or clogged nozzles. Fertilizer spreaders especially need to be emptied; leftover dry fertilizer absorbs humidity and can gum up the works.



Shovels, Rakes, Hoes, and Hand Tools: Suds and Shine

Start with soap and water, then scrub off caked-on soil with a wire brush. Treat wooden handles with a coat of linseed oil or paint to prevent cracking. A quick spritz of lightweight oil or silicone spray on metal parts will keep rust at bay.



Final Check: Tighten, Tune, and Tuck Away

While you're cleaning, inspect for loose screws or bolts and tighten them up. Make note of any tools that need replacing before spring fever hits. Store everything in a dry, protected spot to keep them in top shape.

And don't forget your gas-powered helpers, mowers, trimmers, and edgers. Drain the fuel and clean or sharpen the blades so they're ready to roar when the growing season begins again.

A little off-season care now means you'll be greeted by shiny, ready-to-go tools when the first warm days of spring arrive, no rust, no gunk, no surprises. Your future gardening self will thank you!

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SMALL GRAINS TRIALS

My small grains trials have been planted and are emerging quite nicely.. even the dryland! We received a timely rainfall the night of planting the first set of trials and it gave a few of the locations a nice start. Feel free to drive by these locations and check them out as the season progresses. Give me a call and I'll meet you there, or I can send you a field map. A huge thank you to these growers who have allowed me to take up space in their fields and ask constant questions.

- Wheat Variety Trials
 - Dryland - Castro County
 - Producer: Blake Fennel
 - 34.334222, -102.417722
 - Irrigated - Lamb County
 - Producer: Dustin McFaddin
 - 34.117417, -102.103417
 - Irrigated - Hale County
 - Producer: Tom Gregory
 - 34.0931500, -101.7571910
- Dual Purpose Wheat & Seeding Rate
 - Irrigated - Hale County
 - Producer: Robbie Harkey
 - 34.006177, -101.875000
- Forage
 - Irrigated - Hale County
 - Producer: Lanny Carthel
 - 34.1116780, -101.7264760



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APPLICATOR CONFERENCE

Own a landscaping business and want to learn more? Hold an applicator license and need CEUs to recertify? Interested in learning more about caring for your lawn, trees, and pests around your house? This conference provides learning opportunities as well as training sessions to obtain your applicator license. Registration ends soon!

IMPLEMENT & WYLIE SPRAY CENTER

TEXAS A&M AGRILIFE EXTENSION

DECEMBER 2-3, 2025

South Plains Applicator Conference

HOSTED BY:
KRISTIE KEYS (CASTRO/HALE/LAMB COUNTY)
(325) 665-8790
MARK CARROLL (FLOYD COUNTY)
(806) 983-4912

5 Ag CEU
1 GEN, 2 IPM, 1 L&R, 1 Drift
5 SPCS CEU
1 L&R, 1 Pest. Safety, 1 Pest Control,
1 Lawn/Orn, 1 Weed
Pending TDA Approval

OLLIE LINER CENTER
2000 S. COLUMBIA ST
PLAINVIEW, TEXAS 79072

DAY 1: CEU CONFERENCE

Training for Municipal/Parks Employees, School Maintenance, Golf Course Grounds Keepers, Landscape Pest Management Professionals, Turf Management Professionals, Lawn Care Companies, Others Interested

- Turfgrass Maintenance & Drift
 - Dr. Joey Young, Texas Tech University
- Weed Lifecycle & Identification
 - Dr. Peter Dotray, Texas A&M AgriLife Extension
- School IPM- Ants, Mosquitos, Rodents
 - Mr. Jacob Wightman, Texas A&M AgriLife Extension
- Laws & Regulations
 - Mr. Jacob Wightman, Texas A&M AgriLife Extension
- Tree & Ornamental IPM
 - Emmett Muennink, Arborjet
- Hands-On Demonstrations (Start-Up Equipment/Chemical Needs)
 - Commercial/Non-Commercial
 - Structural
 - Drones

Tentative Agenda

REGISTRATION & SPONSORSHIPS



REGISTRATION CLOSES 11-21-2025

DAY 2: PREPARATION FOR THE TDA COMMERCIAL/NON-COMMERCIAL PESTICIDE APPLICATOR LICENSE TRAINING

Dr. Mark Matocha-Texas A&M AgriLife Extension

Commercial applicator: operates a business or is employed by a business that applies restricted-use or state-limited-use pesticides to the property of another person for hire or compensation.

Noncommercial applicator: is required to be licensed, but does not qualify as a private or commercial applicator. A noncommercial applicator does not solicit pest control but works exclusively on the property of their employer.

Noncommercial political subdivision (NCPS): an applicator employed by a political subdivision of the state of Texas or a federal agency operating in Texas.

Categories:

- Landscape Maintenance (3A)
- Vegetation Management/Right-of-Way (5)

DAY 2: PREPARATION FOR THE TDA STRUCTURAL PEST CONTROL LICENSE TRAINING

Mr. Jacob Wightman, Texas A&M AgriLife Extension

Structural Pest Control Service licenses and regulates pest management professionals who apply pesticides in and around structures.

- A review of the Pesticide Applicator General Standards Manual & SPCS Laws & Regulations
- An approved course to fulfill the structural apprenticeship/noncommercial licensing requirement of taking a minimum 6-hour approved technician training course.

Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service provides equal opportunities in its programs and employment to all persons, regardless of race, color, sex, religion, national origin, disability, age, genetic information, veteran status, sexual orientation, or gender identity. The Texas A&M University System, U.S. Department of Agriculture, and the County Commissioners Courts of Texas Cooperating.

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CROPS CONFERENCES

Food, Fellowship, and CEUs. Don't Miss Out!

- Private Applicators:
- 15 CEUs every 5 Years – Must follow your specific license expiration date
 - Required CEUs for license renewal-
 - 2 in Laws/Regulations, 2 in IPM
 - 10 hours can be earned through approved online courses
 - Alternatively, pass the Private Pesticide Applicator Recertification Exam (\$64) for 15 CEUs.
- Commercial/Noncommercial Applicators:
- 5 CEUs every 1 Year - Must follow your specific license expiration date
 - Required CEUs for license renewal-
 - 1 each in Laws/Regulations, IPM, and Drift Minimization
 - Aerial applicators must take additional CEUs related to aerial applications
 - CEUs may be earned online every other year

Save the date

Lamb County Crops Conference - December 16, 2025 [Littlefield]
Online CEU Conference - December 17, 2025 [Dimmitt]
Castro County Crops Conference - January 15, 2026 [Dimmitt]
Mid Plains Ag Expo - January 22, 2026 [Plainview]
Alternative Crops Conference - March 3, 2026 [Olton]

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Save the Date



November 7: Plains Cotton Growers Advisory Group (Lubbock)

November 21: Plains Cotton Growers Advisory Group (Lubbock)

December 2-3: South Plains Applicators Conference (Plainview)

December 5: Plains Cotton Growers Advisory Group (Lubbock)

December 9-10: Plant Protection Conference (College Station)

December 16: Lamb County Crops Conference (Littlefield)

December 17: Online CEU Conference (All Counties)

January 15: Castro County Crops Conference (Dimmitt)

January 21: TAWC Water College (Lubbock)

January 22: Mid-Plains Ag Expo (Plainview)

January 26: Auxin Training (Littlefield)

February 5: Private Applicator Training (Littlefield)

February 16: Soil Stewards (Olton)

February 18: Auxin Training (Dimmitt)

February 23: Soil Stewards (Olton)

March 2: Soil Stewards (Olton)

March 3: Alternative Crops Conference (Olton)

March 9: Soil Stewards (Olton)

March 24: Auxin Training (Plainview)

March 24: Private Applicator Training (Plainview)

April 10: Private Applicator Training (Dimmitt)

Stay tuned to social media and newsletters for more events



<https://castro.agrilife.org/agronomy/>



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<https://www.instagram.com/castrohalelambagronomy/>



<https://twitter.com/KeysToAgronomy>

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