

TECHNICAL NOTES

What's in a Plant Name?

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Highlight: First described in 1803 as a species of *Chloris*, *sideoats grama* has been given 18 scientific names (Latin binomials) and 10 common names. The valid name combination, *Bouteloua curtipendula*, was published by Torrey in 1848.

Relatively few range scientists and ranchmen are aware of the sequence of events and changes in name usage that have preceded present name designations for many familiar plants. Sideoats grama, the accepted "common name" for the widespread and valuable range forage grass, *Bouteloua curtipendula*, is a good example. Sideoats grama was first known as *Chloris curtipendula*, a name proposed by Michaux in 1803 on the basis of a collection from southern Illinois. Two years later, 1805, M. Lagasca, a Spanish botanist, described the genus *Bouteloua*, named in honor of two Spanish gardeners, the Boutelou brothers. Lagasca listed five species in his new genus, including *B. racemosa*, the sideoats grama taxon. Between 1806 and 1886 the names *Dinebra curtipendula*, *Eutriana curtipendula*, *Cynodon curtipendula*, *Andropogon curtipendula*, *Atheropogon curtipendulus*, *Atheropogon apludoides*, *Bouteloua melicaeformis*, *Melica curtipendula*, *Cynosurus secundus*, *Dinebra secunda*, *Aristida secunda*, *Bouteloua curtipendula*, *Eutriana affinis*, *Atheropogon affinis* and *Heterostega curtipendula*, were proposed by different authors for this same grass.

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It was not until 1848 that John Torrey combined the first published species epithet, *curtipendula*, with the retained genus name, *Bouteloua*, to provide the valid scientific name combination, *Bouteloua curtipendula*.

The vernacular name "sideoats grama" was not commonly used until after 1900. Bessey in 1888 referred to this grass as "muskit grass"; Vasey in 1889 used the names "mesquite grass" and "tall grama grass." Toumey noted in 1891: "This beautiful grass is generally known to ranchmen as Tall Grama although in some localities it is known as one of the Mesquite grasses." In 1896 Wooton reported, "The tall grama' or 'hairy mesquite' is perhaps the most widely distributed of any of the gramma grasses. . . ."

L. H. Pammel of Iowa apparently provided the first published record of the name sideoats grama in 1897. Pammel stated, "Sideoats grama or tall grama (*Bouteloua curtipendula*) is common on the hills in central and western Iowa." S. M. Tracy, for whom the herbarium at Texas A&M University is named, was the next to use the name "sideoats grama," stating in 1898, "It is found from Mississippi to Georgia, though rarely abundant, and its growth should be encouraged."

After 1900 the name sideoats grama came into general usage but other names were used by some authors. In 1904 Pammel et al. referred to this grass as "tall grama oats" and in the same year Bessey used the name "tall grama." Biswell and Weaver (1933) referred to Nebraska plants both as sideoats grama and "slender grama" and J. M. Winter (1936) used the name "prairie grama." In 1938 H. I. Featherly of Oklahoma listed tall grama grass as an alternate name for sideoats grama.

Both the common name, sideoats grama, and the specific epithet of the scientific name, *curtipendula*, are

based on the pendulant disposition of the spikelets on the short reflexed inflorescence branches. The "sideoats" designation for *B. curtipendula* is somewhat of a misnomer in that this grass is not closely related to the oat genus, *Avena*; it is a warm season perennial rather than a cool season annual; and the spikelets are small and crowded, rather than large and loosely arranged as in *Avena*.

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