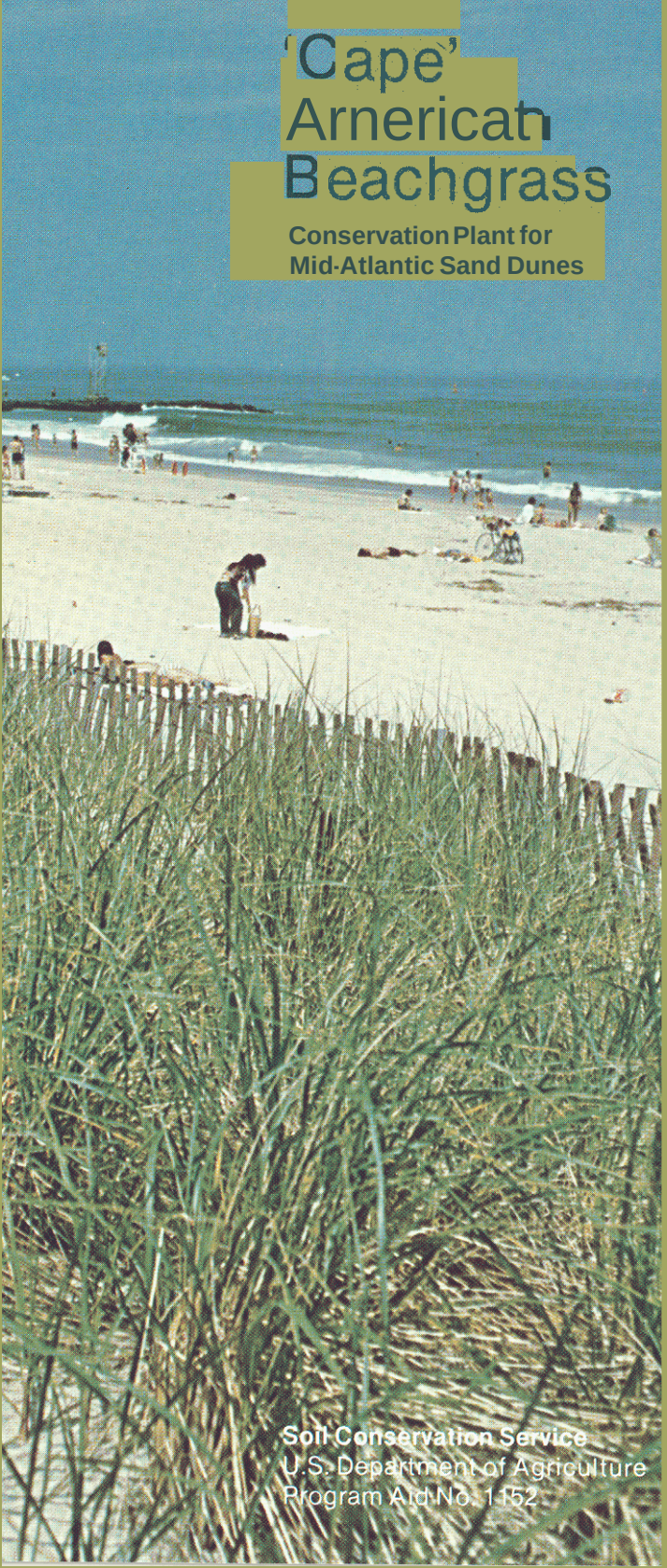
'Cape' American Beachgrass

Conservation Plant for Mid-Atlantic Sand Dunes



Soil Conservation Service
U.S. Department of Agriculture
Program Aid No. 1152

These New Jersey residents are planting 'Cape' American beachgrass to protect their property.

Shore property unprotected by dunes may be damaged during coastal storms

'CAPE' AMERICAN BEACHGRASS

Sand dunes provide the best protection against damaging coastal storms. But dunes are unstable and must be protected from wind and waves by vegetation.

Planting 'Cape' American beachgrass (Ammophila breviligulata) is the most effective way to stabilize dunes and areas of shifting sand in coastal areas from Maine through North Carolina.

You can plant 'Cape' either to stabilize existing dunes or to build new dunes. 'Cape' can also be used to stabilize sandy areas inland, such as roadbanks, abandoned gravel pits, and other disturbed areas.

'Cape' is robust and easy to plant and spreads rapidly. It has more leaves and thicker culms or stems than common American beachgrass. 'Cape' reduces wind velocity near the ground and traps windblown sand. The new sand deposits build the dune and nourish further plant growth.

'Cape' stabilizes dunes and traps windblown sand.

Planting 'Cape' American beachgrass

Communities or individual landowners interested in Stabilizing Shore areas can plant 'Cape'. Small areas can be planted by hand. Transplanting machines can be used for large areas.

The best time to plant is from October 15 to April 15, except when the ground is frozen. Do not plant 'Cape' in summer.

Each plant should consist of three to five healthy culms or stems. Spacing the plants 18 inches apart generally is adequate. This Spacing requires about 19,000 plants per acre.

In areas where severe winds are expected, Spacing plants 12 inches apart gives greater protection.

Stagger the rows to get maximum erosion control.

Maintaining grass cover

Areas Of 'Cape' must be protected from foot traffic. Otherwise stems are broken and the plants die. Fencing planted areas and Walkways through or over dunes is most Common. Barrier shrubs can be used where fences are not practical.

Newly planted and established Stands respond to fertilizer. Fertilizing in spring with 80 pounds of inorganic nitrogen fertilizer per acre produces large healthy plants, dense growth, and good dune stabilization.

This is the growth produced from a single stem of 'Cape' in 4 months.

STEP 1: Open a hole 12 to 14 inches deep with a spade. Place three to five stems in it to a depth of 8 inches.

STEP 2: Press next to the plant to firm the sand and eliminate air space in the root zone.

Fencing protects stands of 'Cape' from trampling.

A planted area looks like this. Soon new growth will spread by underground stems and cover the bare area.

Fertilize periodically to insure good growth or to revive stands.

Planting stock of 'Cape' American beachgrass can be obtained from commercial nurseries.

Obtaining planting stock of 'Cape' American beachgrass

'Cape' is a superior strain of American beachgrass discovered on Cape Cod, Mass., in 1965 by SCS plant specialists.

After extensive testing by SCS in cooperation with Rutgers University, the discovery was named 'Cape' and made available to commercial producers in 1972.

Planting stock of 'Cape' American beachgrass is now generally available from commercial nurseries along the mid-Atlantic coast.

For more information on where to buy plants and how to use and plant them, you can call the local office of your soil conservation district. Assistance is available without regard to race, creed, color, sex, or national origin.

May 1977

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