



# CONSERVATION RESERVE PROGRAM PLANT GUIDE

## BASIN WILDRYE

**Cultivars:** Trailhead, Magnar  
**Seed Size:** 165,000 seeds/pound  
**Form:** Bunchgrass, 36-72" tall,  
Short-spike seedhead

**Area of Adaptation:** Basin wildrye is adapted to areas of the Inland Pacific Northwest and Northern Great Basin that receive between 14 to 24 inches of annual precipitation. It also occurs naturally on sites that receive as little as 8 inches of annual precipitation but receive supplemental moisture in the form of runoff. 'Magnar' is a cultivar originating from a native stand near Nelson, British Columbia. 'Trailhead' originates from a native stand near Roundup, Montana. 'Trailhead' shares the same range of adaptation as 'Magnar' but performs better in northern latitudes while 'Magnar' performs better in southern latitudes.

**Seeding:** Basin wildrye seed is moderately sized and must be seeded no deeper than 1/2". A firm seedbed that allows for good seed to soil contact is necessary for good emergence. Seeding should be completed late in the fall or very early in the spring. It germinates at cool temperatures and grows fairly slowly after emergence. It can be a fairly difficult grass to establish because seedlings emerge and grow slowly.

Basin wildrye seed generally flows through drills without many problems. The seed can bridge if the drill lacks seed agitators. Periodically stirring the contents of the seedbox with a hoe or similar tool will prevent bridging problems.

**Management & Uses:** Basin wildrye is one of the few very-tall, native, aridland, bunchgrasses occurring in the West. The plants grow very tall and robust but stands typically are not dense. The crowns can grow to 2 feet in diameter but the centers of large plants become thick with thatch and decadent. Basin wildrye is a favored plant for many nesting birds because of its tall canopy provides excellent protection from adverse weather and predators.

Basin wildrye is readily grazed by cattle and horses in the early spring and early fall. Grazing should begin when the new growth is 12 to 15 inches high. Fall grazing begins at the same stage of readiness. Some producers do not graze fall regrowth and the crop is left as standing winter forage. Basin wildrye retains its nutritive value in the winter better than most wheatgrasses. Basin wildrye has elevated growing points and is subject to overgrazing.

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