

Scientific Name: *Schizachne purpurascens* (Torr.) Swallen ssp. *purpurascens*

Family: *Poaceae*

Common Names: false melic, false melic grass, purple oat grass

Plant Description

Slender perennial, loosely tufted; culms erect from a short-decumbent base, 40 to 80 cm tall, very slender, sheaths closed; ligules 0.5 to 1.5 mm long; blades are flat; inflorescence an open lax panicle, the branches single or in pairs, more or less drooping, bearing 1 to 2 awned spikelets about 2 cm long, disarticulating above the glumes and between the florets; unequal glumes, shorter than adjacent lemma, purple at base; lemma lanceolate, long hairy callus; awns as long as lemma or longer (Moss 1983).

Seed: Dark brown, dry caryopsis, lanceolate, 1 to 2 mm long.

Habitat and Distribution

Common throughout Alberta. A woodland species, found in aspen, mixed wood and coniferous forests, in montane areas, openings in wooded regions (Tannas 1997).

Seral Stage: Early to mid seral.

Soil: Most commonly found on coarse textured soils in northeastern Alberta.

Distribution: British Columbia, District of Mackenzie to James Bay, northern Quebec, Newfoundland south to New Mexico, South Dakota, Great Lakes; Southern Alaska, southern Yukon (Moss 1983).

Phenology

A cool season grass that blooms in June (Prairie Originals 2009). Seed ripens in July.

Pollination

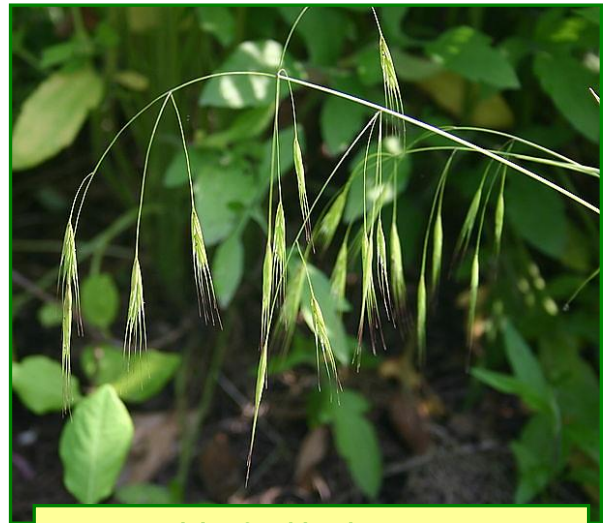
Wind (Friedman and Barrett 2009).

Seed Dispersal

Wind and animals. Awns can catch on passing mammals fur.

Genetics

2n=20 (Moss 1983).



Open panicle of *Schizachne purpurascens*

Symbiosis

None known.

Seed Processing

Collection: Can be harvested by hand into breathable bags.

Seed Weight: 1.70 g/1,000 seeds.

Harvest Dates: Harvested at the end of July in northeastern Alberta.

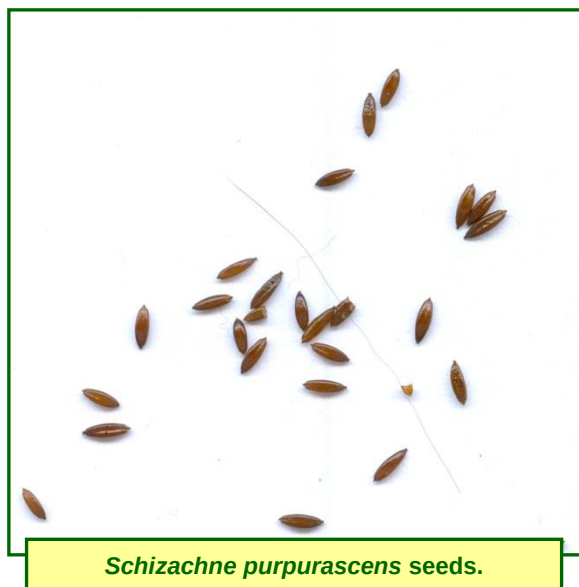
Cleaning: Air-dry seed heads in paper or Tyvek bags at 15 to 25°C. Remove large chaff and crush remaining material. Small chaff and dust can be removed by winnowing.

Storage Behaviour: Orthodox; seeds can be dried, without damage, to low moisture contents, their longevity increase (Royal Botanic Gardens Kew 2008).



Storage: Preliminary results show that viability drops rapidly after a year of cool dry storage. 90% viability following drying to 15% moisture content and freezing for 186 days at -20°C (Royal Botanic Gardens Kew 2008).

Longevity: No literature found.



Propagation

Natural Regeneration: By seed (Friedman and Barrett 2009).

Germination: 90% germination in fresh seed.

Pre-treatment: None required.

Aboriginal/Food Uses

No literature found.

Wildlife/Forage Uses

Livestock: Poor protein levels with high amounts of fiber; only a moderately palatable food source (Tannas 1997). Has fair forage value for beef herds (Saskatchewan Agriculture, Food and Rural Revitalization n.d).

Grazing Response: Increaser (Tannas 1997).

Reclamation Potential

Of limited value in erosion control, *Schizachne* is not yet generally used in reclamation seed mixes (Tannas 1997).

Commercial Resources

No literature found.

Notes

S. purpurascens is listed as 76% intact (less occurrences than expected) in the Alberta oil sands region (Alberta Biodiversity Monitoring Institute 2014).

Is a host for the larvae of the northern pearly-eye butterfly (*Enodia anthedon*) (Government of Canada 2010, Prairie Originals 2009).

Photo Credits

Photo 1: Wild Rose Consulting, Inc.

Photo 2: SB Johnny. 2008. Wikimedia common.

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