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Derivation of the Generic Names of North American Grasses (Names in Current or Recent Use)

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Achnatherum • Gk., scale + barb: awned lemma
Achnella • Achnatherum x Nassella
Acraclnea • Gk., at the tip + chaff or scale: inflorescence branches terminate in rudimentary spikelets
Aegilops • Gk., preferred by goats + appearance: resembling an herb sought out by goats
Aegopogon • Gk., goat + beard: hairy spikelet clusters
Agrohordeum • Agropyron x Hordeum
Agropogon • Agrostis x Polypogon
Agropyron • Gk., a field, country + wheat: resembling wheat
Agrositianion • Agropyron x Sitanion
Agrostis • Gk. & L., a kind of grass, perhaps a Lolium species: now applied to an unrelated grass
Allolepis • Gk., different + scale: unequal lemmas in male and female spikelets
Allopteropsis • Gk., strange + appearance: resembling Panicum
Alopecurus • Gk., fox + tail: spike-like inflorescence
Amelichloa • María Amelia Torres, Argentine agrostologist + Gk., grass
Ammocalamagrostis • Ammophila x Calamagrostis
Ammophila • Gk., sand + loving: coastal dune habitat
Ampelodesmos • Gk. & L., vine + to tie together: leaves once used to tie up grape vines
Amphibromus • Gk. double + Bromus: similarity in spikelets
Amphicarpum • Gk., double + fruit-bearing: plants form both aerial and subterranean spikelets
Andropogon • Gk., man + beard: hairy spikelet pedicels
Anthenticia • Gk., flower + contrary: based on early interpretation of palea in relation to lemma
Anthephora • Gk., flower + to bear: calyx-like involucre enclosing the spikelets
Anthoxanthum • Gk., yellow + flower: yellow-green color of mature spikelets
Apera • Gk., not + mutilated: spikelets similar to Calamagrostis, but sometimes with vestigial florets
Apluda • L., chaff, bran: uncertain, perhaps referring to the persistent boat-shaped spathes
Arctagrostis • Gk. north + Agrostis: resembling Agrostis and found in the Arctic
Arctodupontia • Arctophila x Dupontia
Arctophila • Gk. north + love: a grass restricted to the holarctic
Aristida • L., a stout hair, awn: conspicuously three-awned lemmas
Arrhenatherum • Gk., male + awn: upper floret staminate and awned
Arthraxon • Gk., joint + axis: inflorescence axis breaks apart at maturity
Arundinaria • L., a reed or cane + resembling: resembling Arundo
Astrebla • Gk. without + screw: lemma awn not twisted
Arundo • L., a reed grass: Celtic root suggests a reed growing in wet places
Avena • L., classical name for the oat
Avenula • Uncertain: perhaps a diminutive form of Avena
Axonopus • Gk., axis, stem, axle + foot: digitate inflorescence branches or spreading stolons
Bambusa • Latinized form of bambu or mambu, a Malayan common name
Beckmannia • Johann Beckmann (1739-1811), German botanist, author, historian
Blepharidachne • Gk., eyelash + chaff or scale: ciliate lemma margins
Blepharoneuron • Gk., eyelash + nerve: lemma nerves with long hairs
Bothriochloa • Gk., pit + grass: prominent pit in the lower glume of the sessile spikelets
Bouteloua • Claudio (1774-1842) and Estéban (1776-1813) Boutelou y Soldevilla, Spanish botanists
Brachiaria • L., fore-arm + pertaining to: signal arm-like inflorescence branches
Brachyelytrum • Gk., short + husk: relatively short glumes
Brachypodium • Gk., thick + foot: very short pedicels
Brevipodium • L., short + foot: tussock growth form
Briza • Gk., a kind of nodding grain: drooping spikelets
Bromidium • Gk. Bromus + diminutive: reference unclear because often treated in Agrostis
Bromopsis • Gk. Bromus + resembling: grasses generally treated in Bromus
Bromus • Gk., food: classical name for oats
Buchloë • Gk., buffalo + grass: contraction of Bubalochloë

Calamagrostis • Gk., a reed grass: general aspect of these grasses
Calamophila • Calamagrostis x Ammophila
Calamovilfa • Gk., reed + Vilfa, a grass genus
Catabroса • Gk., devouring or corrosion: uneven glume apices
Catapodium • Gk., below + little foot: spikelets borne on short pedicels
Cathestecum • Gk., stationary: prostrate rhizomes
Celtica • Celts + belonging to: species most common on Iberian Peninsula once occupied by the Celts
Cenchrus • Gk., classical name for proso millet and other small-grained cereals
Ceratochloa • Gk., horn + grass: short lemma awn
Chasmanthium • Gk., hollow + flower: glumes spread at maturity to expose grain
Chloris • Gk., Goddess of flowers
Chondro[s]ium • Gr., grain: uncertain, perhaps the wheat-like spikes in some species
Chrysochogon • Gk., golden + beard: golden hairs at spikelet base
Cinna • Gk., a kind of grass, perhaps barley, an unrelated grass
Cladoraphis • Gk., stem + needle: inflorescence axis terminates in sharp point
Coelorachis • Gk. hollow + axis: concave depressions along inflorescence axis
Coix • Uncertain, perhaps Gk. because of resemblance of beads to the fruits of the doum-palm
Coleanthus • Gk., shear + flower: spikelets enclosed in upper sheaths
Cortaderia • Sp., to cut or harvest, a knife for cutting honey-combs: leaf blades with sharp margins
Cottea • Johann Georg Cotta, Baron von Cottendorf (1796-1863), German patron of Science
Corynephorus • Gk., club-bearing: awn tips are club-shaped
Critesion • Gk. granary or barley: grasses often now included in Hordeum, the barley genus
Cryptis • Gk., hidden: inflorescences of some species concealed in upper leaf sheaths
Ctenium • Gk., a small comb: inflorescence a one-sided spike
Cutandia • Vincente Cutand (1804-1866), a Spanish botanist
Cymbopogon • Gk., boat + beard: hairy spikelets subtended by a boat-shaped leaf
Cynodon • Gk. & L., teeth of a saw, dog tooth: hard, scaly rhizomes
Cynosurus • Gk., dog + tail: shape of the inflorescence

Dactylis • Gk., finger: appearance of inflorescence branches
Dactyloctenium • Gk., finger + small comb: appearance of inflorescence branches
Danthonia • Étienne Danthione, early 19th century French botanist, grasses of Provence
Dasyploca • Gk., hairy + grass: pubescent lemma bases
Dasypyrum • Gk., hairy + wheat: hairy glumes of a grass in the same tribe as wheat
Dendrocalamus • Gk. tree + reed: woody culms
Deschampsia • Louis Auguste Deschamps (1765-1842), French physician-botanist
Desmazeria • Jean Baptiste Desmazeres 1787-1862), French botanist
Diarrhena • Gk., twice + male: florets have only two stamens
 Dichanthelium • Gk., in two + flowering: plants produce panicles in the spring and fall
Dichanthium • Gk. in two + flower: inflorescence of bisexual and male or sterile spikelets
Digitaria • L., finger: appearance of inflorescence branches
Dinebra • Arabic, a little tail: prolonged glume tips
Diplachne • Gk., double + lobes: two-lobed lemmas
Dissanthelium • Gk., two + small flower: spikelets with two fertile florets
Distichlis • Gk., in two rows + smooth: appearance of leaves
Dupoa • Dupontia x Poa
Dupontia • J. D. Dupont, 19th century French botanist, author of a flora of Paris and environs (1813)

Echinochloa • Gk., hedgehog + grass
Ectosperma • Gk., free + seed: grain falls free of palea and lemma at maturity
Ehrharta • Jakob Friederick Ehrhart (1742-1795), German-Swiss botanist, student of Linnaeus
Eleusine • Gk., Eleusis, the ancient Greek town where Ceres was worshiped
Elionurus • Gk., to roll + tail or door-mouse + tail: appearance of inflorescence
Elyhordeum • Elymus x Hordeum
Elyleymus • Elymus x Leymus
Elymordeum • Elymus x Hordeum
Elymotrigia • Elymus x Elytrigia
Elymus • Gk., a kind of millet
Elysitanion • Elymus x Sitanion
Elytrigia • Gk., cover + corn crop: place where it grows, or Elymus + Triticum
Enneapogon • Gk., nine + beard: lemma bears nine awns
Enteropogon • Gk., bowel + beard: long and twisted lemma awn
Eragrostis • Gk., love + grass or early + wild or very much + Agrostis
Eremochloa • Gk., solitary + grass: inflorescence a single spike or desolate + grass: dry habitat
Eremopoa • Gk., solitary + desert + poa (a grass): habitat in Asia and the Mediterranean
Eremopyrum • Gk., desert + wheat: desert grass resembling wheat
Erianthus • Gk., wool + flower: glumes bear long hairs
Eriochloa • L., woolly + grass: hairy spikelets
Ervineuron • Gk., woolly + nerve: palea keels hairy
Euchlaena • Gk., true or well + cloak: sheathing of pistillate spikelets
Eustachys • Gk., true or well + spike: spikelets borne on very short pedicels

Festuca • L., classical name for a weedy grass, stalks, and straw
Festulolium • Festuca x Lolium
Festulpia • Festuca x Vulpia

Gastridium • Gk., a small pouch or sac: appearance of the base of the glumes
Gaudinia • Jean François Gaudin (1766-1833), Swiss cleric and Professor of Botany at Lausanne
Glyceria • Gk., sweet: sweet-tasting grains in some species
Graphephorum • Gk., writing stylus + bear: rachilla extension
Gymnopogon • Gk., naked + beard: well-developed naked rachilla extension
Gynerium • Gk., female + wool: glumes of pistillate spikelets bear long hairs

Hackelochloa • Eduard Hackel (1850-1926), Austrian agrostologist + Gk., grass
Hainardia • Pierre Hainard (1936 -), Swiss phytogeographer
Heliochoa • Gk., marsh + grass: its typical habitat
Helictotrichon • Gk., twisted + bristle: lemma awn column twisted
Hemarthria • Gk., half + joint: inflorescence axis breaks apart at maturity or blood + joint: reddish joints
Hesperochloa • L., western + grass: its single species endemic to the western United States
Hesperostipa • Gk., western + Stipa: region where these needle grasses grow
Heteropogon • Gk., different + beard: difference in awns of the perfect and male florets
Hierochloë • Gk., sacred + grass: use of fragrant plants during religious ceremonies
Hilaria • Auguste François de St. Hilaire (1779-1853), French naturalist
Holcus • L., a kind of grass or Gk. a kind of cereal or grass
Hopia • after the Hopi Native Americans of the American Southwest, where it grows
Hordeum • L., classical name for barley
Hydrochloa • Gk., water + grass: marsh or stream bank habitat
Hymenachne • Gk. membrane + scale: membranous fertile lemma
Hyparrhenia • Gk., below + male: male spikelets at inflorescence base
Hystrich • Gk., porcupine or hedgehog: long awns

Imperata • Ferrante Imperato (1550-1625), Italian apothecary and naturalist
Ischaemum • Gk., to hold back + blood: seeds used to stop bleeding

Jarava • Juan de Jarava, Spanish physician and naturalist
Karroochloa • Karroo region of South Africa + Gk., grass
Kikuyuochloa • Kikuyu people of Kenya + Gk., grass
Koeleria • Goerg Ludwig Koeler (1765-1807), German botanist

Lachnagrostis • Gk. wool + Agrostis: resembling Agrostis, but lemmas hairy
Lagurus • Gk., hair + tail: inflorescence resembles a hare’s tail
Lamarckia • Jean Baptiste Antonine Pierre Monet de Lamarck (1744-1829, French naturalist
Lasiacis • Gk., woolly + point: lemma and palea end in tufts of hairs
Leersia • Johann Daniel Leers (1727-1774), German apothecary and botanist
Leptochloa • Gk., slender + grass: inflorescence a series of slender spikes
Leptoloma • Gk., thin + border: the narrow margin of the bisexual floret
Lepturus • Gk., slender + tail: slender inflorescence or narrow glumes
Leucopoa • Gk. white + poa (a grass): spikelet color
Leydeum • Leymus x Hordeum
Leymus • anagram of Elymus
Limnodea • Gk., marshy or alteration of Limnas, a grass genus now included in Alopecurus
Lolium • L., classical name for a troublesome weed or an inedible grass
Lophochlaena • Gk. crest + cloak: appearance of lemma apex
Lophochloa • Gk., crest + grass: appearance of lemma apex
Luziola • Luzula, a genus of sedges + resembling
Lycurus • Gk., wolf + tail: spike-like inflorescence

Macrobriza • Gk. large + Briza: with spikelets similar to Briza, but larger
Manisuris • Gk., necklace + tail: resemblance of inflorescence to a beaded necklace
Megathyrsus • Gk. large + wand: conspicuous panicle
Melica • L., honey + belonging to: sweet flavor of stem or a millet or Italian for sorghum
Melinis • Gk., a kind of cereal
Mibora • Gk., small + food: producing little grain or forage
Microchloa • Gk., small + grass: diminutive plant size
Microstegium • Gk., small + cover: glume size
Milium • L., millet: classical name for the proso millet
Miscanthus • Gk., stalk + flower: pedicellate spikelets
Mnesitheia • Mnesitheus, early Greek physician and herbalist
Molinia • Juan Ignacio Molina (1740-1829), Chilean missionary-botanist
Monanthochloe • Gk., one + flower + grass: inflorescence consists of a single spikelet
Monsera • Gk., one + support: spikelet has only one glume
Monroa • see Munroa

Moorochloa • Gk., foolish + grass: published only because a well-established generic name not permitted
Muhlenbergia • Gotthilf Heinrich Ernst Muhlenberg (1753-1815), American Lutheran minister and botanist
Munroa • General Sir William Munro (1818-1880), British soldier, botanist, bamboo expert

Nardus • Obscure. Gk. for spikenard or other aromatic plants, which this grass is not
Nassella • L., a kind of basket used to catch fish; fanciful reference to spikelet appearance
Neeragnostis • Gk., new + Eragrostis: plants resembling that genus, but dioecious
Neostaphia • Gk., new + Otto Stapf (1857-1933), Austrian-British botanist at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew
Neyraudia • Anagram of Reynaudia, a grass genus named for A. A. Reynaud, a plant collector in Burma
Notodanthonia: Gk., south + Danthonia: southern hemisphere grasses once included in Danthonia

Olyra  •  Gk., an ancient name for a kind of grain
Opizia  •  Philipp Maximilian Opiz (1787-1858), Czech botanist
Opismenus  •  Gk., armed: awned glumes and sterile lemmas
Orcuttia  •  Charles Russell Orcutt (1864-1929), Southern California botanist
Oryza  •  Gk., classical name for rice
Oryzopsis  •  Gk., rice + resembling: similarity in appearance of grains

Panicum  •  L., classical name for millet or bread + belonging to, suggesting use in bread making
Pappophorum  •  Gk., grandfather + bearing: lemmas long-haired, as in an old man’s beard
Pappostipa  •  Gk. grandfather + Stipa: plumose awn-column
Parapholis  •  Gk., near + Pholiurus, whose glumes resemble the scales of a snake
Pascoyrum  •  L., pasture + Gk., wheat: inflorescence wheat-like
Paspalidium  •  Paspalum + Gk. -idium suffix suggesting a diminutive resemblance
Paspalum  •  Gk., classical name for a kind of millet
Pennisetum  •  L., feather + bristle: spikelets subtended by feathery bristles
Phalaris  •  Gk., classical name for a grass with shiny spikelets or L. for the bright part of a helmet
Phalaroides  •  Phalaris + Gk. resembling: spikelets similar to those of Phalaris
Phanopyrum  •  Gk. bright + wheat: appearance of the grain
Pharus  •  Gk., mantle, sheet, or cloth: leaves used to make clothing
Phippsia  •  Captain Constantine John Phipps (1744-1792), British explorer of the Arctic
Phleum  •  Gk., classical name for a marsh reed
Phragmites  •  Gk., hedge + resembling and L., a kind of reed growing in hedges
Phyllostachys  •  Gk. leaf + spike: appearance of the pseudospikelets
Piptatherum  •  Gk., falling + bristle or spine: deciduous lemma awns
Piptochaetium  •  Gk., falling + bristle: deciduous awns
Pleiochasia  •  Gk. several + bud or sprout: nodes appear to have several buds
Pleurophus  •  Gk. several + needle: glumes and lemmas bear 2+ awns or Gk., side: awn position
Pleurospora  •  Gk., rib + beard: lemma veins densely hairy or to the bristly palea
Poa  •  Gk., classical name for grasses or for other plants providing fodder
Podagrostis  •  Gk., foot + Agrostis: spikelets resembling that genus, but with prolonged rachilla
Pogonarthria  •  Gk., beard + joint: hairy rachilla internodes
Polypogon  •  Gk., many + beard: appearance of the inflorescence
Polytrias  •  Gk., several + three: spikelets three per node
Psathyrostachys  •  Gk., brittle + spike: inflorescence axis breaks readily into segments at maturity
Pseudoroegneria  •  Gk., false + Roegneria, a genus of grasses
Pseudosasa  •  Gk., false + Sasa, a genus of bamboos
Ptilagrostis  •  Gk., feather + Agrostis: spikelets resembling that genus, but with feathery awns
Puccinellia  •  Benedetto Luigi Puccinelli (1808-1850), Italian botanist, Director of the Botanical Gardens (Lucca)
Pucciphippsia  •  Puccinellia x Phippsia
Redfieldia  •  John Howard Redfield (1815-1895), Philadelphia businessman and amateur botanist
Ripidium  •  Gk., fan: shape of the inflorescence
Reimarochloa  •  Juan Alberto Enrique Reimar (1729-1814), German physician and biologist + Gk., grass
Rhynchelytrum  •  L., beak + scale or cover: short beak of upper glume and sterile lemma
Rostraria  •  L., beak + pertaining to: beaked lemma
Rottboellia  •  Christen Friis Rottboell (1727-1797), Danish botanist
Rytyderisma  •  Gk., wrinkled + seed: name an error for mistaking wrinkled larvae for grains

Saccharum  •  L., sugar: sweet culms of sugar cane and related species
Sacciolepis  •  Gk., small bag or sack + scale: inflated upper glume
Sasa  •  Japanese for various species of small bamboo
Schedolium  •  Schedonorus x Lolium
Schedololium  •  Schedonorus x Lolium
Schedonnardus  •  Gk., near + Nardus, a grass genus
Schedonorus • Gk. near to + tail: short awn of lower glume
Schismus • Gk., a splitting: two-toothed lemma apex
Schizachne • Gk., split + chaff or scale: bifid lemma apex
Schizachyrium • Gk., split + chaff or scale: deeply bilobed upper lemma
Sclerochloa • Gk., hard + grass: hardened glumes
Scleropoa • Gk., hard or dry + grass: spikelets similar to Poa, but leathery
Scleropogon • Gk., hard + beard: upper florets reduced to long hairs
Scolochloa • Gk., prickle + grass: lemma apex toothed
Scribneria • Frank Lamson Scribner (1851-1938), American agrostologist, U. S. National Herbarium
Secale • L., classical name for a cereal
Setaria • L., bristle + possessing: spikelets subtended by one or more bristles
Setariopsis • L., Setaria + resembling
Sieglingia • Johann Blasius Siegling (1760-1835), Professor of Botany, Erfurt, Germany
Sinochlamus • L., China + reed: a bamboo native to China
Sitanion • Gk., grain of barley or wheat + occurrence: inflorescence similar to those grasses
Sorengia • Robert John Soreng (b. 1952), American agrostologist, U. S. National Museum
Sorghastrum • Sorghum + L., somewhat resembling
Sorghum • It., sorgho, the common name for the plant
Spartina • Gk., broom: leaves used to make brooms similar to those made from Spartium junceum
Sphenopholis • Gk., sedge + scale: shape of the upper glume
Sporobolus • Gk., seed + to throw: mature seeds expelled from grain at maturity
Steinchisma • Gk. narrow + gaping hollow: spreading bracts of lower floret
Stenotaphrum • Gk., narrow + trench: spikelets sunken in pits on inflorescence axis
Stipa • Gk., coarse component of plant fibers; L., tow: fibers used in rope making
Stiporyzopsis • Stipa x Oryzopsis
Swallenia • Jason Richard Swallen (1903-1991), American agrostologist, U. S. National Herbarium

Taeniatherum • Gk., ribbon + awn: flattened base of lemma awns
Themeda • Uncertain: Arabic name for a grass or for a ditch filled with water
Thinopyrum • Gk. beach + wheat: resembling wheat and growing on dunes
Torreyochloa • John Torrey (1796-1873), American physician, botanist, and chemist + grass
Trachypogon • Gk., rough + beard: hairy lemma awn
Tragus • Gk., he-goat: Gk. for Hieronymus Bock (1498-1554), German botanist (bock German for goat)
Triboilum • Gk. three + a point: spikelet with three florets and bristly glumes
Trichachne • Gk., hair + chaff: long hairs of glumes and sterile lemmas
Trichloris • Gk., three + Chloris, a similar grass, but with three-awned lemmas
Trichoneura • Gk., hair + nerve: lemma with ciliate keels
Tridens • L., three + tooth: three-toothed lemma apex
Triplasis • Gk., triple or three-fold: lemma apex bears an awn and two lobes
Tripogon • Gk., three + beard: lemma apex bears three awns
Tripsacum • Gk., three + small pieces: inflorescence axis breaks apart into three or more segments
Triraphis • Gk. three + needle: three principal lemma nerves extended as short awns
Trisetum • L., three + bristle: three-awned lemma
Triticosecale • Triticum x Secale
Triticum • L., classical name for wheat, derived from the word for grind
Tuctoria • Anagram of Orcuttia

Uniola • L., a kind of grass
Urochloa • Gk., tail + grass: lemma contracts abruptly to form a tail-like awn

Vahlodea • Jens Laurentius Vahl (1796-1854), Danish plant collector and librarian
Vaseyochloa • George Vasey (1822-1893), American physician, agrostologist with the U. S. D. A. + Gk., grass
Ventenata • Étienne Pierre Ventenat (1757-1808), French botanist, cleric, and librarian
Vetiveria • Tamil, cut + root: referring to propagation or its aromatic roots
Vulpia • Johann Samuel Vulpius (1760-1846), German apothecary and botanist
Willkommia • Heinrich Moritz Willkomm (1821-1895), German botanist, Director of Botanical Garden (Prague)

Zea • Gk., a kind of one-seeded grain or L., for a kind of wheat
Zizania • Gk., a weed of grain fields, perhaps darnel, an unrelated grass
Zizaniopsis • Gk., Zizania + resembling
Zoysia • Karl Zois Edelstein (or Karl von Zoys) (1756-1800), Austrian botanist
Zuloagaea • Fernando Omar Zuloaga (b. 1951), Argentine-American botanist

PRIMARY SOURCES


Harvard University Herbaria. Index of botanists. kiki.huh.harvard.edu/databases/botanist_index.html

