

Bottlebrush grass (*Elymus hystrix*)

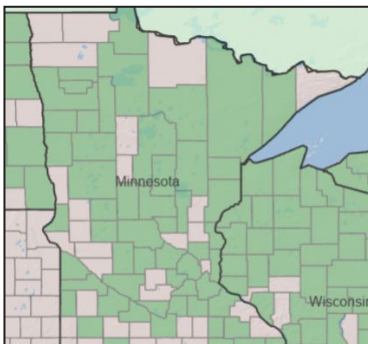
Family: Grass (Poaceae)

DESCRIPTION: True to its name, the spikes of this native perennial grass resemble bottle brushes. The unique inflorescences appear in late spring or early summer, featuring widely spaced spikelets attached nearly perpendicular to the stalk. The grass occurs naturally in woodland openings and edges, savannas and partly shaded riverbanks.

USES: In native plant gardens, the grass' height and distinctive spikes can accentuate and add texture to border plantings. Bottlebrush grass is sometimes used in woodland and savanna restorations. It lacks rhizomes, but its fibrous roots can stabilize soils on hillsides. Northern pearly-eye caterpillars eat the leaves, as do the larvae of many flies, beetles, butterflies and moths.

REFERENCES:

[Minnesota Wildflowers](#)
[Illinois Wildflowers](#)
[Native Plant Network](#)
[Cornell Botanic Gardens](#)



Range Map Credit: USDA Plants Database



Photo Credit: Susan Nelson

Planting Recommendations

Bottlebrush grass does best in full to partial shade, with dry to moist, loamy soils. It flourishes under the canopy of trees, along wooded paths or in woodland gardens or restorations. The unique, showy spikes that appear in late spring persist into late summer or early fall when the grass drops its seeds. Seeds germinate in fall, overwintering as seedlings. Bottlebrush grass cannot compete with aggressive plants. To encourage self-seeding, it's advisable to thin any dense cover surrounding the plants. Alternatively,

collect the seeds and sow them elsewhere. If seeds are stored, keep them cool and dry before sowing in pots or trays. To germinate, cover lightly with a growing medium and provide warm conditions. No pretreatment is needed. In ideal conditions, germination begins one to two weeks after sowing and continues over several weeks. Bottlebrush grass tolerates drought and is deer resistant. Good companion plants include early meadow rue, wild columbine and zigzag goldenrod.

STATEWIDE WETLAND INDICATOR STATUS: FACU

ID: Growing up to 5 feet tall, with dark green, arching straplike leaves up to 12 inches long, bottlebrush grass produces erect, loose spikes. The spikes grow up to 8 inches long with horizontal spikelets. Ligules (thin appendages where the leaves joins the sheaths) are membranous, white turning brown, often with auricles (small ear-like appendages at the base of the leaf). Lemmas have straight or slightly wavy awns up to 1½ inches long.

SIMILAR SPECIES:

Virginia wild rye (*Elymus virginicus*) spikes are dense with spikelets attached to the stalk at acute, not perpendicular, angles. The spikes of Canada wild rye (*Elymus canadensis*) are arching with curved awns.

Developed by Susan Nelson, a botanist and author/curator of [Larkspur Plant Resources](#)

