

Evaluation of native plants for future seed releases for South Texas

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South Texas Natives continues to work to evaluate various native plants species for potential release of additional restoration seed products. While 24 native plant seed releases have been made by the program to date, over 2,000 plant species occur in the region. New evaluation projects started in 2013-2014 included southern witchgrass and tropical sage. Ongoing evaluations specific to South Texas needs include seacoast bluestem and tropical neptunia.

Southern witchgrass is colonizing, early successional grass species that is well-adapted to sandy soils. This species germinates readily from seed, produces forage that is consumed by cattle, and provides copious amounts of seed eaten by game birds. This species is also of particular interest due to need for additional native seed sources for use on sandy soils to improve restoration success on these sites. We are currently evaluating 7 accessions of this species from 5 different counties.

Tropical sage is an attractive forb with showy red flowers that grows well on heavy clay soils throughout the region. This plant is a good source of nectar for many butterfly and hummingbird species. Tropical sage has demonstrated excellent seed production ability, as well as excellent germination and establishment characteristics. Seacoast bluestem and tropical neptunia evaluations are focused on developing seed production methodology for these desirable species. Each of the 4 species being evaluated is likely to be considered for release to commercial seedsmen in coming years, resulting in commercially available, ecotypic seed for use in South Texas restoration.

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