

Prairie Cord Grass *Spartina pectinata*

Poaceae—Grass family

by Tom Reaume © 2011 Nature Manitoba

Grant: 

A perennial grass 0.2–2.3 m tall in colonies from sharply pointed **rhizomes** 1–40 cm long by 2–10 mm thick, slightly hollow, stiff, tan to reddish, covered with pointed scales 1–3 cm long; along river and stream banks, swamps, ditches and moist prairie.

● **FLOWERS** green, blooming June–October; **inflorescence** a single panicle of spikes, terminal, total length 5–50 cm by 3–22 cm wide, the nodes 0.5–5.5 cm apart; **floral branches** (peduncles) naked, scabrous, 2–48 mm long by 0.5–0.8 mm thick, reduced above, ascending, each with 1 spike; **spikes** 2–50 per inflorescence, each 1.3–12 cm long by 3.5–4.5 mm wide (across the rachilla), reduced above; **pedicels** (of spikelets) 1–2.5 mm long, flat, hairs along both sides continuing onto the midveins of both glumes; **spikelets** 1-flowered, overlapping, each 9–25 mm long (including awns) by 2–2.5 mm wide by c. 1 mm thick, laterally compressed, crowded and alternating in 2 rows along two sides of the triangular, light purple rachilla of each spike, 10–80 per spike, averaging c. 6 spikelets per cm of spike; **rachilla** edges wavy, 0.4–1.2 mm wide (midway), flat on the outside edge with appressed white hairs along all 3 sharp edges, each side c. 1 mm wide, with the apical spikelet attached c. 6 mm from the rachilla tip that extends like an awn from each spike; **glumes** 2, unequal, scabrous along the midnerves and awns; **1st glume** 1-nerved, the body 4–9 mm long by 0.3–0.5 mm wide (one side), with an awn 1–4 mm long; **2nd glume** 3-nerved, the body 9–14 mm long by 1 mm wide (one side) with a scabrous awn 2–10 mm long; **lemmas** 1-nerved, awnless, 6–10 mm long by c. 1 mm wide (one side), the midnerve scabrous, apex bidentate; **paleae** 2-nerved near the center, glabrous, as long as or slightly longer than the lemmas and c. 1 mm wide (across one folded side), the apex with 2 teeth c. 0.2 mm long; **stamens** 3; **anthers** 4.5–7 mm long, reddish purple, exserted and hanging; **styles** 2-parted; **stigmas** spreading, 4–5 mm long, exserted, feathery; **flower to fruit** 8–9 weeks.

● **FRUIT** a grain, 1-seeded, body 5–7.6 mm long by 1.1–1.6 mm wide by 0.5–0.7 mm thick, flattened, often with a 1 mm long remains of a style at the apex, hairless, tan, walls thin; **seeds** brown, smooth, filling the grain, divided lengthways into 2 distinctly colored parts.

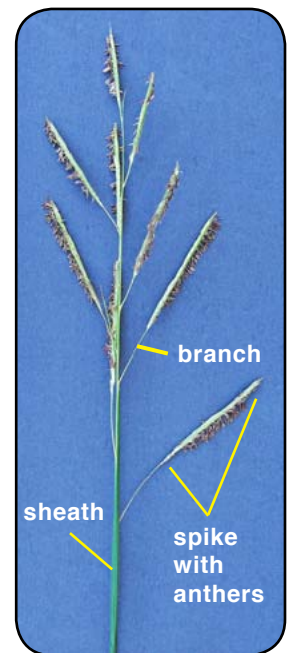
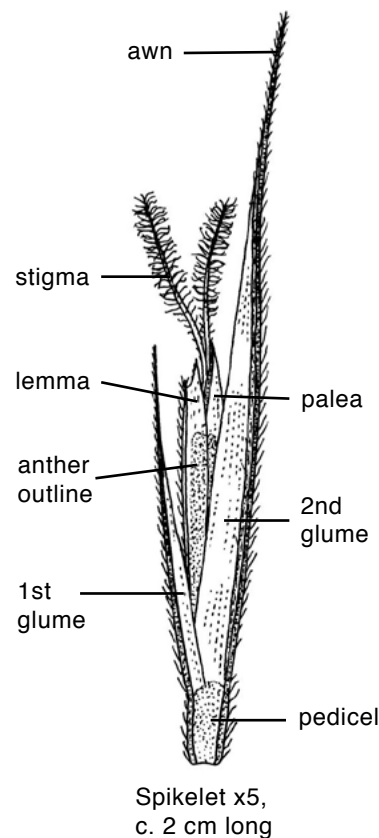
● **LEAVES** erect, alternate, 3–6 per culm, the uppermost blade usually extending through and up to 60 cm beyond the apex of the inflorescence; **blades** flat, becoming tightly involute on drying in the autumn, 11–120 cm long by 4–15 mm wide, the edges scabrous, strongly ridged above, glabrous below, ascending with arched tips, tapered to a long fine point; **ligules** a fringe of hairs 2–4 mm long united at their bases to a tan membrane c. 0.3 mm long; **auricles** absent; **sheaths** glabrous, reddish at the apex in autumn, open their full length, lower margins overlapping.

● **STEM** a culm, erect, round, hollow, glabrous, persists overwinter, some vegetative; 3–10 mm thick near the reddish base; **nodes** unremarkable.

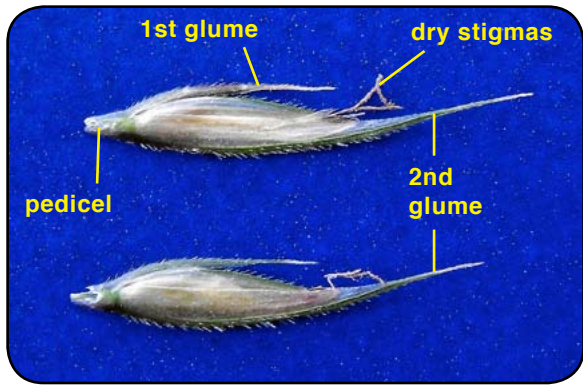
● **RANGE:** (CAN) 10 provinces; (USA) 41 states; a native.



A colony of Prairie Cord Grass to about 1.3 m tall along the bank of Sturgeon Creek in Winnipeg, Manitoba



Inflorescence 30 cm long in bloom with 9 alternating spikes



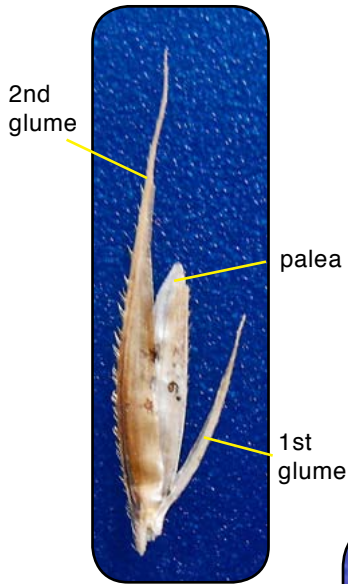
Two spikelets c. 17 mm long with wilted stigmas



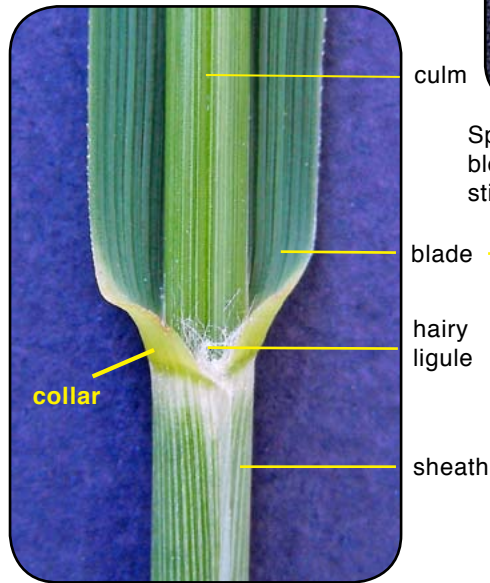
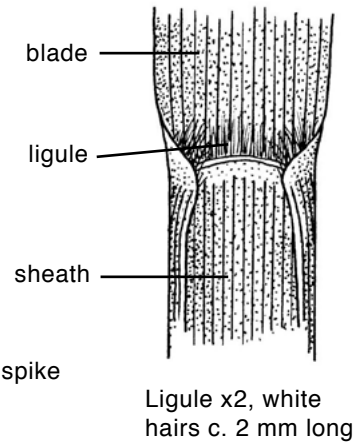
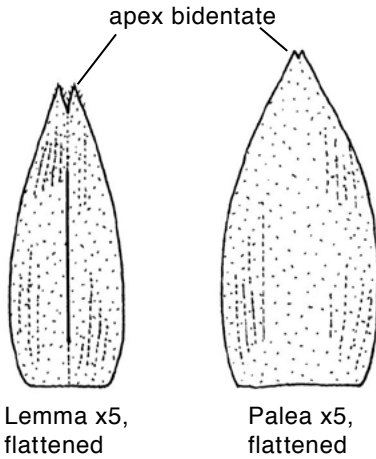
Prairie Cord Grass spike 8.6 cm long with white stigmas exerted



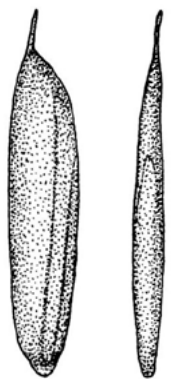
Spike 8.2 cm long with purplish anthers exerted



A spikelet 18 mm long, the length defined by the scabrous 2nd glume

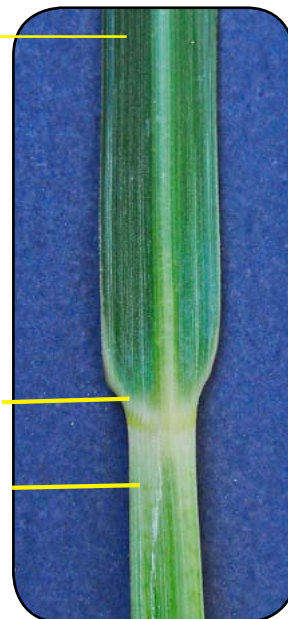


Collar with a ligule of white hairs, ventral (inner side) of leaf



Fruit (grain) x6

Spike in early stages of blooming with the white stigmas visible



Leaf collar from dorsal (outer) side in Winnipeg, Manitoba



Inflorescence emerging from top leaf's sheath



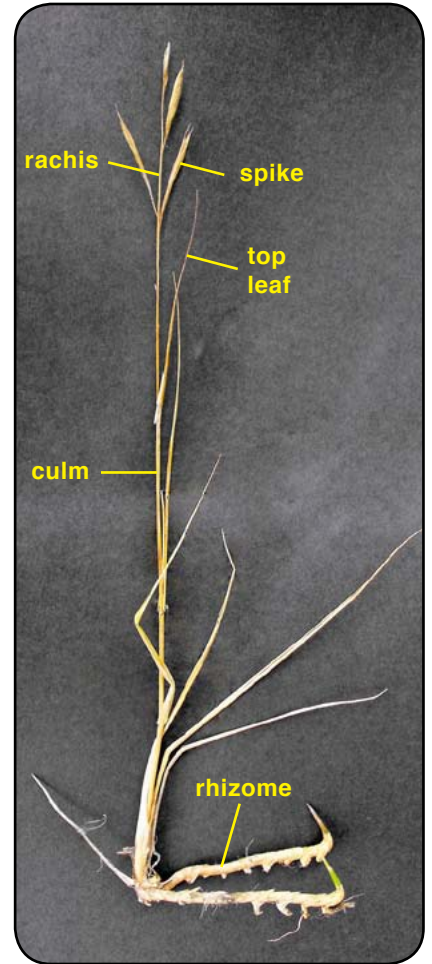
Spike 8 cm long with exerted, hanging purplish anthers



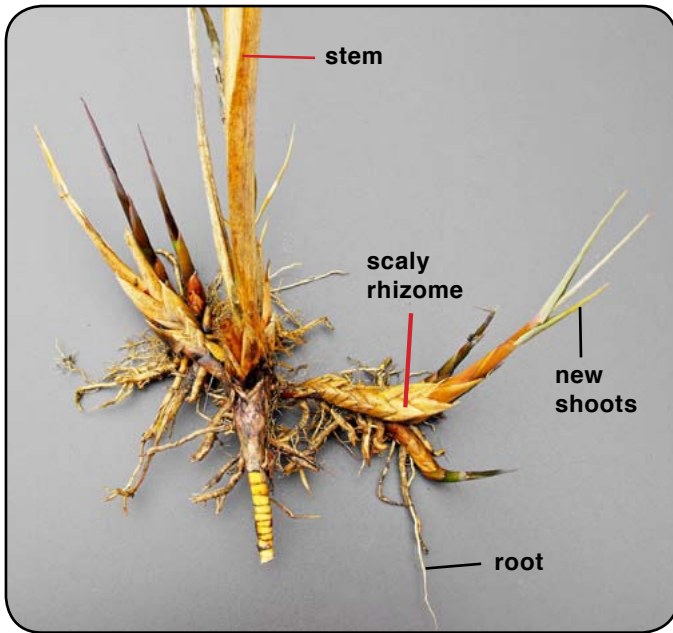
Spike 7 cm long (left) in fall with dark brown central rachilla c. 1 mm wide with golden spikelets attached and ascending on two sides



New erect shoots from rhizome in fall



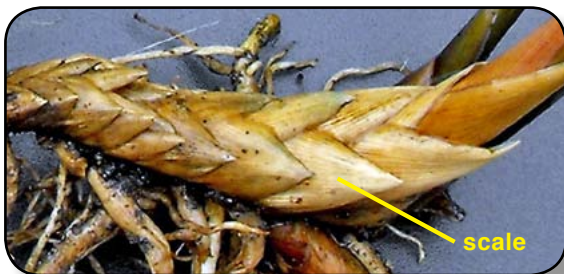
A 33 cm tall plant with fruit during the fall in Winnipeg, Manitoba



Rhizomes and new shoots from base of plant in fall



Prairie Cord Grass 2 m tall with pinkish erect new shoots developing in the fall and a long rhizome 5 mm wide



Scaly pattern of a rhizome