

American Beachgrass

One EXTREME Coastal Plant



American Beachgrass.

Impress your friends with the Latin name:

Ammophila breviligulata

People will really think you're smart when you speak Latin, even if they don't know what you're talking about.

It takes a special kind of plant to be able to live in a harsh, and sometimes nasty, sand dune environment. How nasty is it?

- It constantly gets buried with sand, sometimes up to a metre deep!!
- High winds constantly pelt it with sand (ouch!).
- It has to put up with extreme temperatures – Down to minus forty degrees Celsius in the winter and up to plus 40 degrees in the summer.
- Lack of food and moisture. It lives in almost pure sand, which doesn't have a lot of nutrients.

It's a clever little plant, because it has adapted well to its environment, and can deal with this **extreme** living. It doesn't reproduce well by seed, because the high winds off the lake blow most of the seeds away. So it sends out rhizomes, or underground root runners, to sprout new plants.

American Beachgrass also produces a huge mass of roots that allow the plant to find every little morsel of food and drop of water that it needs to survive.

Not only that, but it sucks up the mineral silica from the sand to use to build its leaves. This makes the leaves hard and tough to withstand the sand blasting it gets from the blowing sand. Its leaves are also long and thin, and that helps it to conserve water, because there isn't as much leaf surface area for water to be lost through transpiration (another word for plant sweat).



American Beachgrass is a pioneer plant. That means it's one of the first plants to make the dunes its home. Once the beachgrass has come in and stabilized the dune, other plants feel safe enough to come in to the dunes as well. A whole plant community develops, and this provides a great habitat for all kinds of animals and insects.

American Beachgrass is only one of many interesting dune species. But by now you're no doubt impressed that it's one of the most amazing plants you'll ever know! We need to protect our dunes by protecting the plants which grow on them. Take care when you're in the dunes not to trample any plants, and teach others about what you know about the importance of these special areas of Lake Huron.

This extreme information on American Beachgrass has been brought to you by:



The Lake Huron Centre for Coastal Conservation

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