

# PINELAND THREEAWN (Wiregrass)

by Lewis L. Yarlett

A number of native grasses have great value for landscaping as well as decorative purposes. Pineland threeawn has been suggested for use in border plantings. Others will be described and illustrated in future issues of **The PALMETTO**.

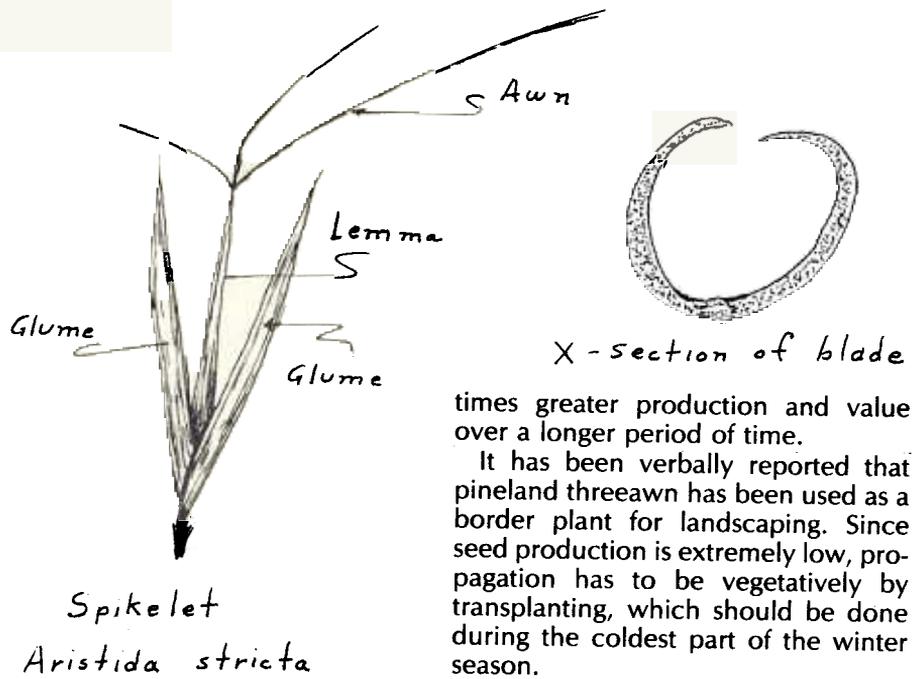
Pineland threeawn, *Aristida stricta* (Michaux), is perhaps the best known native grass in Florida. It bears the more common name of wiregrass. The botanical name is derived from the Latin *Arista*, meaning awn, which is the bristle or slender hair-like projections on the lemma of the spikelet. The species of *Aristida* have three awns which accounts for the common name of threeawn.

Historically, pineland threeawn was probably collected as early as 1803 in South Carolina. Records indicate collections in Georgia around 1852. One of the earliest to describe vegetative types in Florida and associate "wiregrass" as a species was Lt. J.C. Ives in 1856. Likewise, Hitchcock (1902), Harshberger (1914), Harper (1927), and Davis (1943) listed the ecosystems of South Florida and included "wiregrass" as a component of the flora. A large number of ecologists, botanists, researchers, and conservationists have since collected and studied pineland threeawn. An exhaustive study by Parrott (1967) indicated that pineland threeawn will not enter into reproductive phase unless burned during or subsequent to the previous fall. Also, very little seed is produced in south Florida.

Pineland threeawn is easily recognized by its tough rolled blades which appropriately account for its more common name. Most authors list the grass as a bunch grass with a fibrous root system. Other authors maintain that pineland threeawn produces rhizomes (underground stems). The author has found only rare instances of short rhizomes.

Pineland threeawn is a perennial, with basal growth often six to eight inches in diameter, leaf blades twelve to twenty inches long, rolled, and hairy on the upper side at the base. The inflorescence is narrow, ten to twelve inches long. The awns are nearly equal.

Pineland threeawn is distributed



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throughout the Forested Coastal Plain of the Southeastern United States, and occurs on the deep, low-fertility sands of the region. Locally, pineland threeawn is closely associated with saw palmetto.

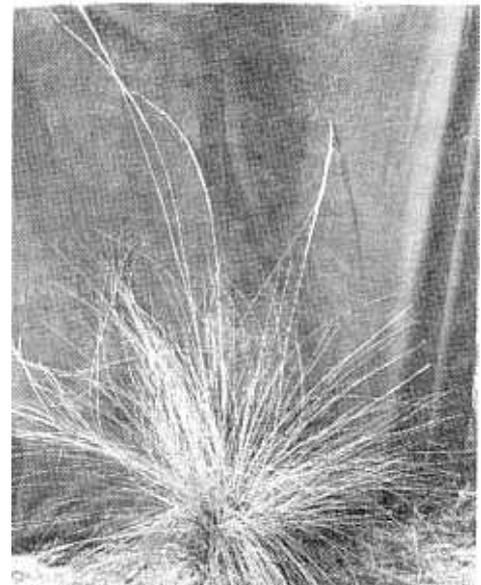
This grass, along with eighteen other species of the genus *Aristida*, occur in Florida. Therein lies a unique feature of its distribution. The threeawns primarily grow in the temperate and arid regions of the world. Their occurrence in Florida is still to a large degree unaccounted for.

For as long as the cattle industry has prevailed in Florida pineland threeawn has been used as a native grazing resource. This was accomplished by burning the old tough, wiry growth and grazing the new spring growth. A small amount of nutritious forage was available for a short six to eight weeks; thereafter the grass became tough and unpalatable. Fire was again used in one or two years. Thus, the "wiregrass management" of the native forage resources was a long established practice.

Recently, range management practices introduced from the west and adapted to Florida conditions has changed the grazing management practices. Other species of grasses in Florida, long overgrazed (particularly the bluestems and panicums), will through management replace pineland threeawn with eight to ten

times greater production and value over a longer period of time.

It has been verbally reported that pineland threeawn has been used as a border plant for landscaping. Since seed production is extremely low, propagation has to be vegetatively by transplanting, which should be done during the coldest part of the winter season.



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