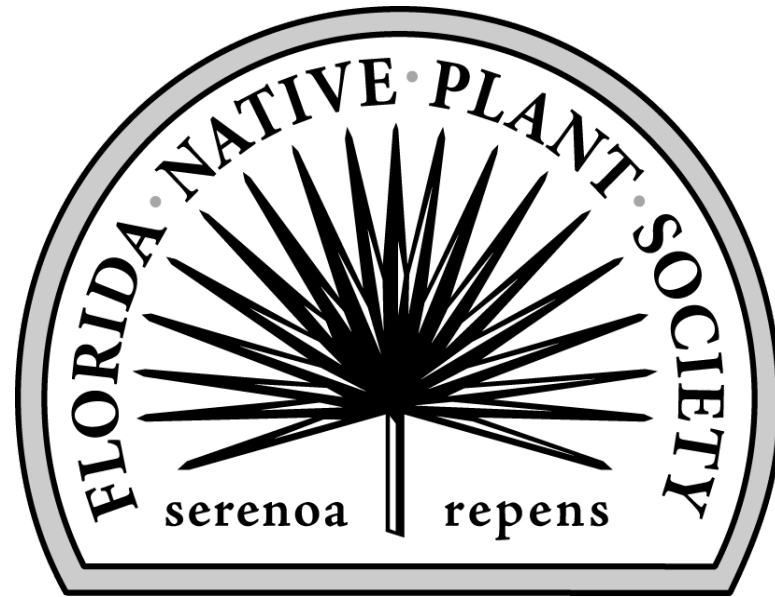


Florida Native Plant Society



Native Plant Owners Manual

Muhlenbergia capillaris – Muhly Grass

Mark Hutchinson

For Your Information

All date and seasonal references are applicable to the eastern panhandle of Hernando County where the plants portrayed in this presentation grow, and this manual was created. This area happens to be a cold spot in central Florida due to the Brooksville Ridge and approximates a Hardiness Zone of 8a or 8b, average annual low temperatures ranging between 10 and 20 °F.

Please note that any reference to medicinal or culinary use of plants or plant parts should in no way be considered an endorsement by the Florida Native Plant Society of any sort of experimentation or consumptive use.

Please do not attempt to rescue any native plants without first reviewing the [FNPS Policy on Transplanting Native Plants](#)

Feedback is welcome: mhutchinson10@tampabay.rr.com

Muhly Grass



© 2011 Mark Hutchinson

Muhlenbergia capillaris



Hairawn Muhly, pink muhly, gulf muhly, hair grass, Texas muhly grass, Florida muhly grass, mist grass, hair-awn muhly, long-awned smokegrass, muhly grass

Muhlenbergia (mew - len - BERG - gee - uh)

Named after Heinrich Ludwig Muehlenberg (1753 – 1815), German educated Lutheran minister and first president of what is now Franklin and Marshall College, Lancaster, Pennsylvania. America's first outstanding botanist, published *Index Flora Lancastriensis* in 1785.

capillaris (kap – ill – AIR - iss)

From the Latin '*capillus*', meaning having hair, or hair like.

Biological and Genetic Relationships

Muhlenbergia capillaris (Lam.) Trin. – hairawn muhly

└─ *Muhlenbergia* Schreb. - muhly

└─ Poaceae (grasses)

Joinvilleaceae

Restionaceae

Flagellariaceae

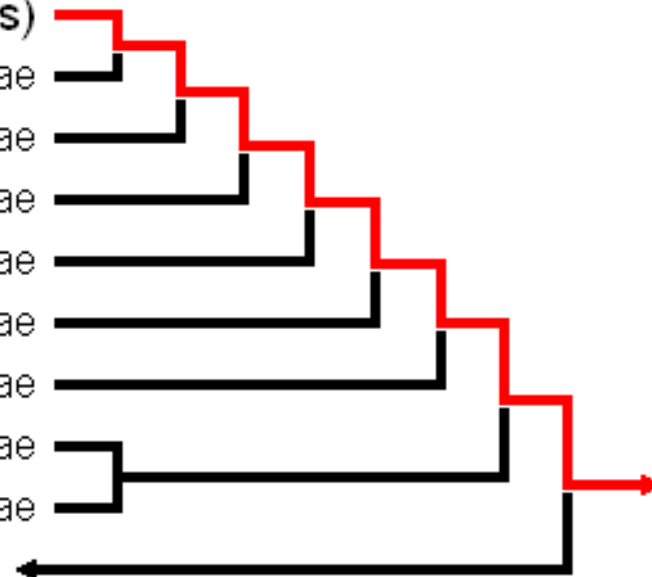
Typhaceae

Cyperaceae

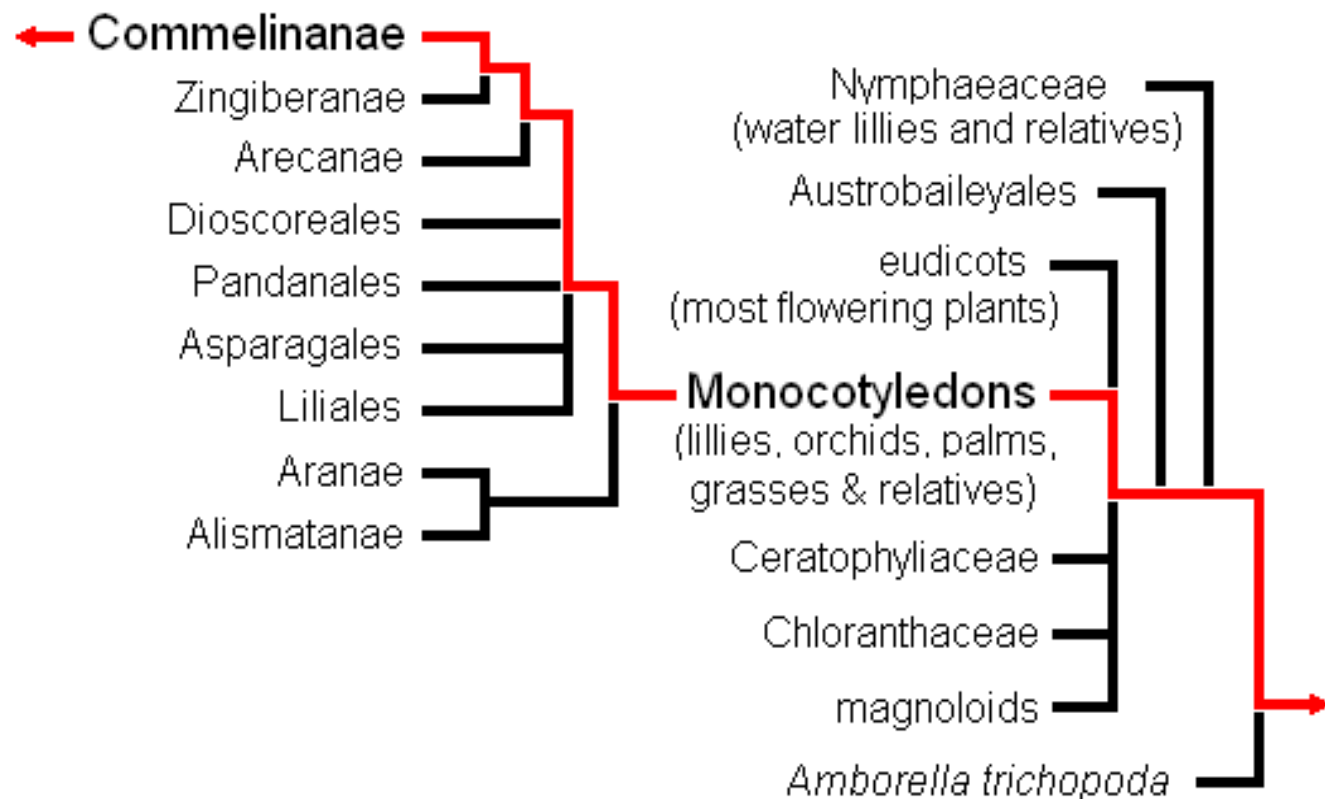
Eriocaulaceae

Rapateaceae

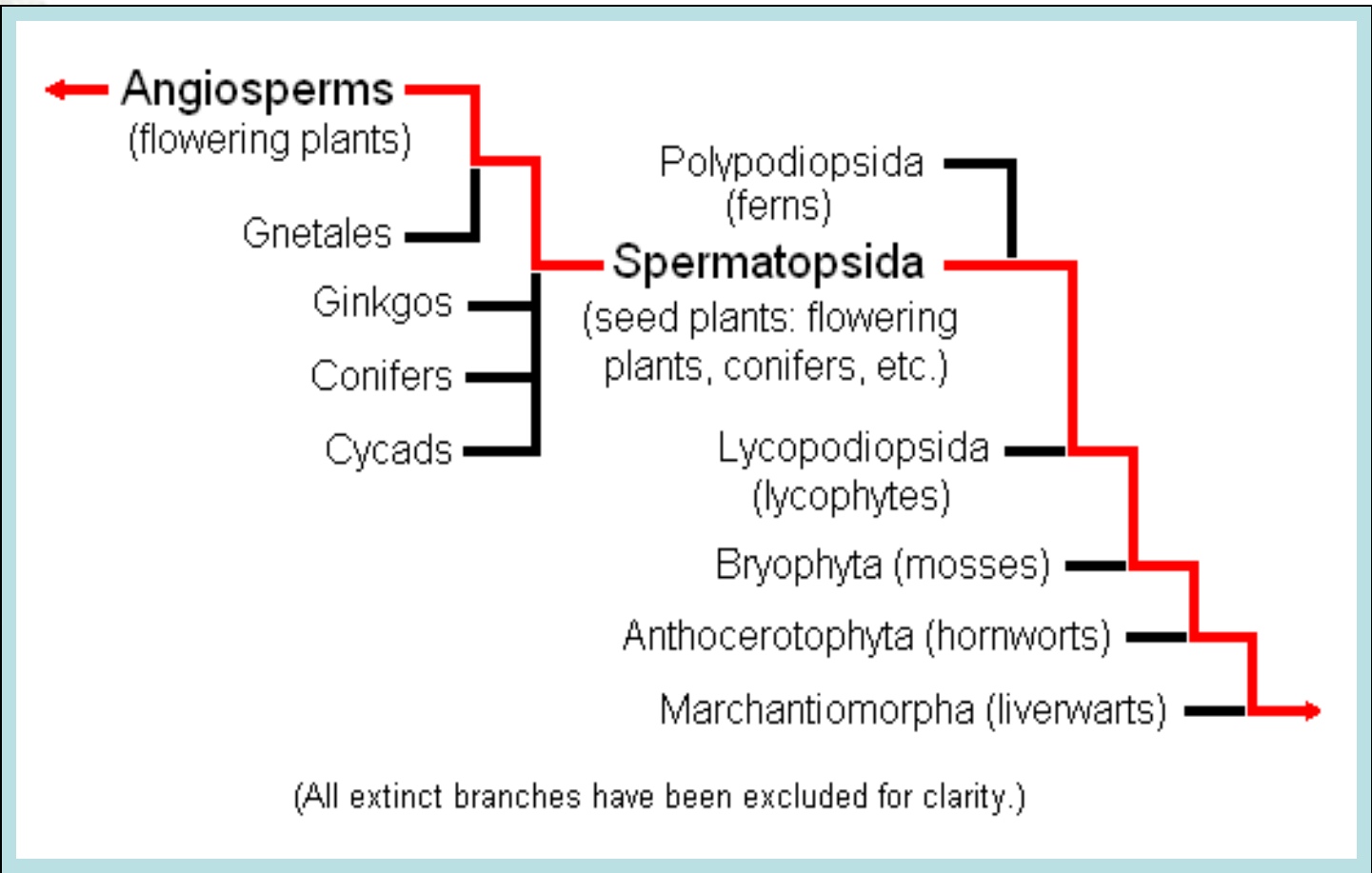
Bromeliaceae



Each species is a leaf on the Tree of Life. Its genetic connections can be explored by following the branches (red line), towards the roots of life.



(Individual species and genus denoted by italics)



There is still more to go, follow this link to explore more of the University of Arizona's [Tree of Life](#).

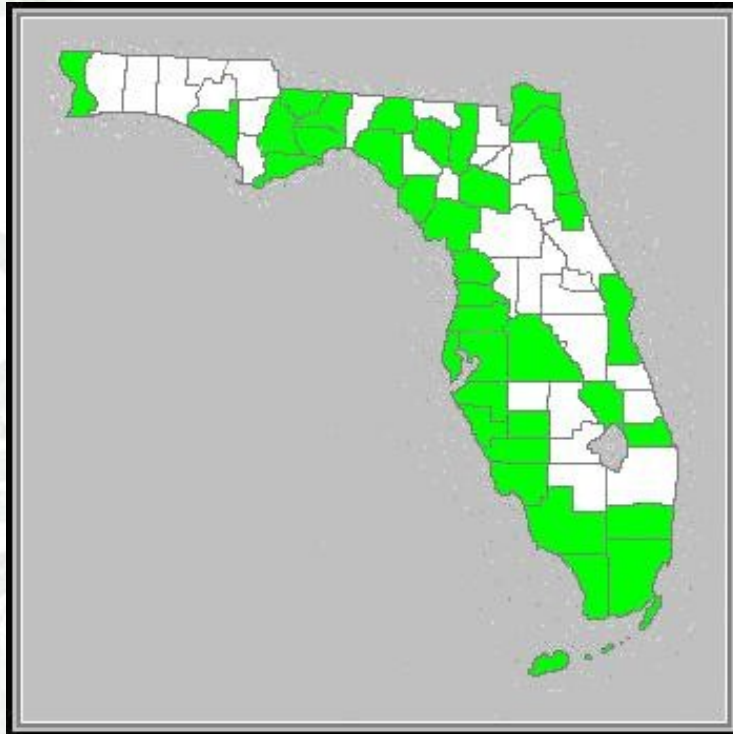


- The United States Department of Agriculture, NRCS, lists a total of 70 species of the genus *Muhlenbergia* Schreb. throughout North America.

- The Atlas of Florida Vascular Plants lists five species of this genus occurring in Florida, all native.

**Robert K. Godfrey Herbarium
FSU #202881 Wakulla County,
9/18/2008**

Species Distribution within Florida



(*vouchered – indicates that a fully documented dried specimen has been deposited in an approved herbarium)

- Muhly Grass, a perennial grass, is *vouchered in approximately thirty-seven counties in Florida, favoring the Gulf and Atlantic coast.
- *Muhlenbergia capillaris* is a very adaptable species found from marsh areas to uplands pine forest.

Growing Conditions



to



• *Muhlenbergia capillaris* prefers direct sun to slight shade

- Pink Muhly will grow in many soils, sandy to marly and is somewhat salt tolerant
- Medium to slightly acid soil – 5.8 to 6.8 pH
- Good drought tolerance, also flood tolerant
- Hardiness: USDA Zone 5a: to -28.8 °C (-20°F)
to USDA Zone 10b: above 1.7 °C (35 °F)
- Flowering and seed production occur from late summer through late fall
- Height: 36 - 40 inches (90 - 100 cm.)

Plant Structure and Life Cycle

When *Muhlenbergia capillaris* first emerges it can be easy to miss. The delicate, glossy, dark-green narrow leaves of this perennial grass can easily disappear.

The seed often germinate in cracks and crevices. In sidewalks and paved surfaces of urban areas and rock fissures of uplands habitat.





Muhly Grass has a fibrous root system adept at surviving wild fire.

Following winter, the dead and dried, fine narrow leaves of Hair Grass are excellent kindle for fast moving wild fire. Burning in the early spring enhances flower production in the fall and winter, and also aides in regeneration later in the spring and summer.

The unbranched, wire-like stem and leaves of Pink Muhly tend towards dense tufts of growth with leaves growing as long as forty inches.

This grass is quite adaptable, it thrives in a wide variety of soils, poor to rich, is drought tolerant, yet can also handle flooding well. A very attractive addition to any native landscape.





In the fall and winter *Muhlenbergia capillaris* demonstrates how it received one of its common names - Pink Muhly Grass. Very fine branched seed heads, half as long as the entire plant develop in a feathery deep pink hue. This display comes about just as many other plants are losing their colors and getting ready for a winter nap.

Seed Collection and Propagation

Muhlenbergia capillaris, like most grasses, reproduces sexually, with the wind being the assumed pollinator.

Brown seeds are produced in the diffuse panicle with very fine capillary branches that form the inflorescence, or flower head. The seeds are elliptic and very small, about 2 to 2.5 millimeters long. When adequately dried the seeds can be collected using a comb, leaving the misty flower head primarily intact.



Maintenance and Care

Once winter is over and spring is near, there will be an accumulation of dead and dried leaves. An attractive way to remove this build-up and get Muhly Grass ready for the growing season is to loop a cord around the plant pulling the leaves into a pony tail sticking straight up. Then using a sharp set of shears cut the pony tail off parallel with the ground. When the cord is removed, the plant will spring into a very neat and attractive half sphere.

Another method for removing dead foliage is to burn the plant in early spring, as would occur with natural wild fire. For safety this can be done by placing an open ended 55 gallon drum over the plant before torching it.

Presentation References

- Biological and genetic relationships

University of Arizona [Tree of Life](#)

- North American distribution

[USDA - Natural Resource Conservation Service](#)

- Florida distribution

[Atlas of Florida Vascular Plants](#)

- Herbarium specimen

[Robert K. Godfrey Herbarium FSU](#)

Presentation References (cont.)

- Growing conditions & general information

[New England Wild Flower Society](#)

[Wildflower Center, UTA](#)

[Floridata](#)

- FNPS – Plants in your area

[FNPS.org](#) This Link will take you to a map of Florida. Click your county on the map to see if Hairawn Muhly can be found there.

- [Florida Plants](#) by zone and habitat, use your county name or zip-code to see native habitat classifications and appropriate plants.

- For more in-depth study:

Native Florida Plants: Low Maintenance Landscaping and Gardening. Robert G. Haehle and Joan Brookwell. 2004 (revised edition). Taylor Trade Publishing. ISBN 1589790510.

Florida Plants for Wildlife: A Selection Guide to Native Trees and Shrubs. Craig N. Huegel. 1995. Orlando: Florida Native Plant Society. ISBN 1885258046.

Grafting, Budding, Cutting, Layering & Other Ways of Propagating Fruit Plants in Florida. 1995. Gainesville: Institute of Food & Agricultural Science. ISBN 0916287092.