

Beachgrass: American (Cape variety) or Champlain: What's the Difference, and Who Cares???

Sandy Bonanno, Eastern Lake Ontario Project Director
The Nature Conservancy, 7 So. Jefferson St., Pulaski, NY 13142
298-2040; email: sbonanno@tnc.org

Differences

Champlain

American (Cape variety)

Native
Compact
Spikes around July 4

Introduced
Larger, more expansive
Spikes around Labor Day

Why Care?

- Champlain beachgrass is very rare – presently confirmed only from Lake Champlain and St. Lawrence river downstream of Lake Champlain. Last year a scientist confirmed that eastern Lake Ontario beachgrass is also Champlain
- Cape variety was developed from the wild American beachgrass on Cape Cod. It was selected for cultivation because it is a particularly vigorous strain. The concern is that cape may be capable of overwhelming Champlain beachgrass – it may behave like a weed.

How to Do Restoration?

- We have been thinning vigorous stands of native beachgrass, as you would a perennial flower bed. The we have used the thinnings to plant damaged dune areas. We have found that the thinned stands have regrown more vigorously than they were, confirming that thinning of healthy stands is safe for healthy beachgrass.
- A number of volunteers in the friends of Sandy Pond Beach have become expert at this technique. Some would be happy to teach others the method.