



Native Grasses of Louisiana

Native Grass Series

Switchgrass

Big Bluestem

Little Bluestem

Indiangrass

Eastern Gamagrass

Fact Sheet

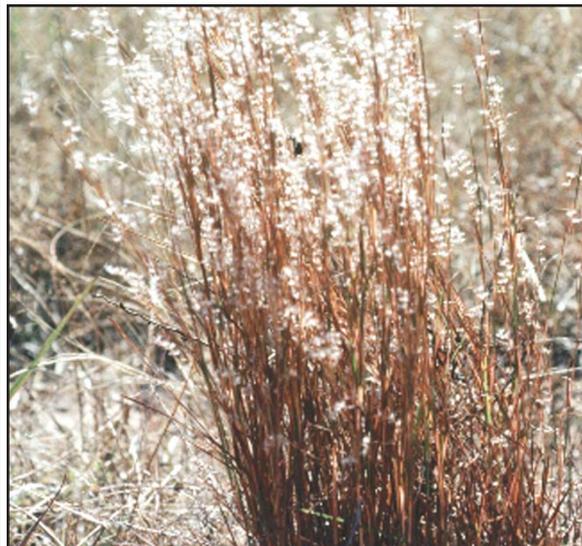
Little Bluestem

Description

Little bluestem (*Schizachyrium scoparium*) is an upright perennial, warm season bunchgrass reaching two to four feet in height at maturity. The slender leaves are bluish green or green and turn reddish brown at maturity. The sheaths are flattened, and the tillers are almost spoon shaped at the bases. It has small fuzzy seeds with twisted awns. Growth starts in spring and matures in late summer. Seeds ripen in early fall. Little bluestem reproduces from tillers, short rhizomes and seed production. The root system is dense and commonly extends five and a half feet into the soil.

Adaptability

Little bluestem will thrive over a wide range of soils in all parts of the state. It is highly drought resistant and moderately shade tolerant. It is a major species in true prairies and is also found in savannas, open woods, and drier sites. It does not seem to be well adapted to wet soils. The varieties 'Aldous' and 'Cimmaron' are recommended in Louisiana but have not been extensively tested in the state.



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Establishment

Planting can be done anytime between December and May, when moisture and growing conditions are favorable. The optimum planting time is February 1 - May 15. It should be seeded into a well prepared, firm seedbed that is free of competition from other vegetation. The seeding rate for a monoculture is 7-10 pounds of Pure Live Seed (PLS) per acre. When seeded as a mixture, the rate is adjusted according to the desired percentage. Little bluestem seed is chaffy and will not flow through conventional drills. Drills with a fluffy seedbox are required to seed

unprocessed seed. Seeds can be debarbed. This process removes much of the chaff and hair, allowing it to be seeded using conventional equipment. There are rangeland drills that can handle debarbed seed. Use of broadcast seeders, hand broadcasting, and aerial seeding are acceptable methods of seeding where conditions permit seed to be placed in contact with mineral soil and where uniform seed distribution can be achieved. It will be necessary to use a cultipacker, press wheels or similar techniques following broadcast seeding to aid coverage of seed. Seed should be

planted 1/8 to 1/2 inch deep if adequate moisture is present, or 1/2 to 3/4 inch deep if soil surface is dry. Most native grasslands or forests being reseeded will require little, if any fertilizer for establishment. However, a soils test to determine phosphorous requirements would be helpful. If phosphorus and potassium are used, they may be applied at time of planting. Nitrogen fertilization should be delayed until seedlings have reached a height of 4 to 6 inches to prevent excessive use of fertilizer by competing vegetation. If seeding old cropland fields, a soil test is recommended.

Management

Little bluestem can be moderately difficult to establish and may need to be deferred 1 to 2 years before being grazed or hayed. In good conditions, the plants can be grazed during the first year of growth. Little bluestem should not be grazed until it reaches 12 inches in height. During the growing season, rotational grazing is recommended. The cattle should be removed when the grass reaches 6 inches in height. Allow 3-4 weeks for recovery. It can be grazed closer during the plant's dormant season, but plants should not be grazed closer than three inches. Without proper grazing or prescribed burning, little bluestem bunches can form dead centers. Prescribed burning in the late winter and spring will increase seed production and improve forage quality. However, if burning is done during very dry conditions, the crown of the plant may suffer damage. Avoid clipping or grazing little bluestem 30 days prior to the first frost.

Uses

Little bluestem is readily grazed by livestock and deer. The seed is eaten by songbirds and upland gamebirds. The plant provides cover for ground birds and small mammals. Little bluestem is useful in ornamental plantings because of its blue-green leaves during the growing season and attractive rusty color with white

fluffy seedheads in the fall.

Where To Get Help

For more information about little bluestem, contact your local Natural Resources Conservation Service office or visit following websites:

<http://plant-materials.nrcs.usda.gov>

<http://www.la.nrcs.usda.gov>



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