



Fact Sheet **5** Range and Pasture

# Native Grasses of Louisiana

## Native Grass Series

Switchgrass

Big Bluestem

Little Bluestem

Indiangrass

**Eastern Gamagrass**

### Fact Sheet

### Eastern Gamagrass

#### Description

Eastern gamagrass (*Tripsacum dactyloides*) is a warm-season perennial bunchgrass with short, thick, knotty rhizomes. It can be distinguished from other warm-season grasses, even when young, by its smooth, flat, coarse stem and wide leaves. When mature, it has a seed head with two or more spikes that are six to ten inches long. The flowers are borne with the female flowers at the base of the spike and the male at the end. The seed-bearing capsules break apart at joints so each capsule contains one seed. Flowering stalks reach a height of five to nine feet. It is found in swales, on banks of streams, and other moist sites.



#### Adaptability

Eastern gamagrass is winter and drought hardy. It is adapted to all soil textures and drainage classes but prefers deep, well-drained, and moist loams and clays for optimum production. It grows best in low areas or areas that can be irrigated. Varieties 'Pete,' 'luka' and 'lukaIV' are recommended in Louisiana.



Photograph provided by Dr. Jimmy C. Henning, University of Kentucky



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## Establishment

Eastern gamagrass can be planted using dormant or stratified seed. Non-stratified Seed - Plant from 21 days after first fall frost date to 30 days before last spring frost date. This will normally be from November through February to allow at least six weeks of temperatures below 45 degrees F after planting. Stratified (Pre-chilled) Seed - Seed from 15 to 60 days after last spring frost date, or when soil temperature is at least 55 degrees F. Seedbed should be smooth, firm,

and weed free, or a standing dead litter mulch (where applicable). Seed should be drilled (not broadcast). They should be planted from 3/4 to 1 1/4 inches deep. Row spacing should be 16 to 38 inches. Drilled seeding rate is 8-10 pounds per acre Pure Live Seed (PLS). Corn and cotton planters can be used to plant eastern gamagrass seed. To include eastern gamagrass in a native mixture, it may not be possible to use the usual grass drill. The other native grass seeds should

be planted with a native grass drill, then over-seeded with eastern gamagrass by using a corn planter. Weed control is critical for stand survival. The use of both herbicides and mowing may be necessary. Follow all label directions, state laws, and safety procedures when spraying. Delay herbicide application until the grass plants have at least four leaves to prevent stunting their growth. The stand may be mowed when plants reach a height of 6-12 inches.

## Management

Since eastern gamagrass is such a palatable forage, it should be planted and managed as a monoculture in most situations. If planted in a mixture, it should be used only with compatible species such as switchgrass, indiangrass and big bluestem. Even then, grazing preference and distribution problems will probably occur unless a good rotational grazing program is followed. Eastern gamagrass should not be grazed until the grass reaches 15 inches. The cattle should be removed when the grass is grazed to an 8 inch height. Eastern gamagrass has excellent potential for hay production. The best quality hay is cut in the boot stage. Do not cut hay shorter than 6-8 inches. Burning helps remove excess residue in the spring, stimulates growth and improves forage quality. When managed as a hay crop, allow 45 days between harvests to maintain a productive stand. Avoid clipping or grazing eastern gamagrass 30 days before first frost.

## Uses

The primary uses of eastern gamagrass are livestock forage and hay seeded in pure stands. It is more productive, palatable, and nutritious than the other native perennial warm season grasses. Eastern gamagrass can be used as an alternative to annual silage crops or as a pasture forage where intensive rotational grazing is well managed.

### Where To Get Help

For more information about eastern gamagrass, contact your local Natural Resources Conservation Service office or visit following websites:  
<http://plant-materials.nrcs.usda.gov>  
<http://www.la.nrcs.usda.gov>

