



PLANTING GUIDE
‘AMERICUS’ INDIANGRASS
Sorghastrum nutans

USDA-NRCS Jimmy Carter PMC
Americus, Georgia



SPECIES: Indiangrass (*Sorghastrum nutans* (L.) (Nash.))

RELEASE NAME: ‘Americus’

GENERAL INFORMATION: Indiangrass is a native perennial warm season forage grass. It is a tall robust grass, which produces an attractive golden panicle in the fall. USDA-NRCS Jimmy Carter Plant Materials Center recently released a new cultivar called ‘Americus’.

DESCRIPTION: It is a native of the southeast (Georgia and Alabama). It has a wide range of adaptation. It has been grown primarily in pure stands. Conservation uses include: forage, buffers, wildlife, urban landscapes and critical areas. (It is the only indiangrass variety that is native to the southeast).

USE: Americus will be primarily used as livestock forage. However, this attractive native grass also shows potential as an urban landscape and restoration plant.

ADAPTATION: Americus is tolerant of most upland sites. It is most productive on moderately well to well drained soils. It shows potential for adaptation in coastal plain and piedmont in the Southeast.

ESTABLISHMENT:

Indiangrass seed have appendages with fine hair and will not pass through conventional equipment unless they can be ordered as “debearded” or brushed seed. Debearded seed may pass through a conventional drill, though it may still be best to use a special drill designed for fluffy seed. Seed drills advertised as “native grass drills” such as a Tye or Truax drill, have special boxes equipped with picker wheels and augers which help prevent seed from sticking together and move the seed to the drilling mechanism. Many native seed drills have multiple boxes, which allow for the sowing of both switchgrass and fluffy seeded species at the same time. Indiangrass should be seeded at ¼ to ½ inch deep. In sandy soils be especially careful not to bury seed too deep! Planting native grasses with conservation tillage equipment is not recommended at this time.

If a seed drill is not available, seed may be broadcast over a site. Broadcast fluffy seed (indiangrass) with a drop spreader or cyclone spreader and then drag to lightly cover seed. If you are using a cyclone spreader, try mixing seed with inert matter such as kitty litter or sawdust for better spreading. Successful broadcast seeding can be achieved by increasing seeding rate and by rolling or cultipacking before and after seeding. When planting a small area (1/4-acre) in droughty conditions, an optional step to enhance the stand would involve lightly mulching the seeded area.

SOILS: Americus is most productive and adapted to moderately well to well drained sites.

PLANTING DATE: Time of optimum planting can vary due to soils, latitude and elevation. We recommend April 1- April 30 in the Piedmont and March 15 – May 15 in the Coastal Plain as the normal optimal planting dates.

FERTILIZATION: Under low pH conditions, apply enough lime to raise pH to around 6.0. After establishment and under a rotational grazing system in Southwest Georgia 600#/AC 10-10-10 before grazing and 75#N/Ac after each grazing event for a maximum application of 210#N/Ac is applied.

SEEDING RATE: Broadcast 10 pounds pure live seed/acre, or 7-8 pounds pure live seed/acre drilled.

PLANTING DEPTH: Under most conditions for best results plant approximately ¼ inch deep.

PLANTING EQUIPMENT: Planting can be accomplished with fertilizer spreaders followed by cultipackers. Also Truax type native grass drills can be utilized.

MANAGEMENT: At establishment apply fertilizer according to soil test recommendations. However, do not apply N fertilizer during indiangrass establishment. N application at this time will encourage weed competition. Delay N fertilization until indiangrass is well established.

Grazing of indiangrass is normally conducted 2-3 years after establishment.

The Jimmy Carter PMC recommends a rotational grazing system for proper utilization of this grass. The rotational system should contain enough paddocks for a 25-30 day rotation cycle. The grass in each paddock should be approximately 24 inches high before grazing. Each grazing event should leave an average of 8-10 inches of minimal stubble for proper stand maintenance. Also refer to the fertilization section for fertilization recommendation in rotational systems.

PRESCRIBED BURNING: Native warm season grasses are especially well adapted to management with fire. A spring burn will remove old growth, recycle nutrients tied up in standing dead vegetation, control brush invasion and produce a succulent forage for calves and young stock. Prescribed burning is the most economical method to improve or maintain native grasses. The best time to burn is from December through March. Check with the State Forestry Commission before burning.

MOWING:

Mowing native warm-season grasses can also be an effective way of management. The best time of year to mow is during the fall through late winter. Mow on a three-year cycle where 1/3 of the area is mowed each year. Do not mow during the spring or summer months because of the nesting season. When mowing, cut grass no lower than 6 inches and allow stubble to remain until spring to help insulate plant roots and provide cover for wildlife. If native warm-season grasses are cut lower than 6 inches during the active growing season, the stand will be reduced significantly.

WEED CONTROL: Post-planting weed control requires prompt attention especially during the establishment year. Inspect the planting every two to four weeks for weed pressure. Light infestations of foxtail or broad-leaved weeds during the establishment year are generally not considered to be a problem. Severe infestations of noxious or highly competitive weeds, such as crabgrass, may require spot spraying with an herbicide such as glyphosate. There are a few broadcast herbicides available to control weeds in native grass restoration plantings. Plateau™ is a relatively new herbicide labeled for most warm-season grasses, though switchgrass may be sensitive to this herbicide. The use of glyphosate during the winter when warm-season grasses are dormant may be useful for controlling cool-season species such as tall fescue. A combined program of mowing, herbicides, and prescribed burning often provides the best results for controlling weeds.

Weed Control the First Year: Mow the growing plants to a height of 8-10 inches during June, July and August. This will slow the weeds but won't harm the grasses. It is important to mow early and often to assure adequate control. Mowing height should never be less than 6 inches.

Weed Control the Second Year: Evaluate the stand to determine if mowing for weed control is necessary. If it is, mow to a height of 8-10 inches. For wildlife habitat, do not disturb during nesting season.

If there is enough material for a spring burn, burning may be used for weed control. Spring burns will tend to encourage warm-season species and work well to control cool-season plants.

Burn, in the spring, when the cool-season plants are growing and the warm-season plants are just barely starting to grow.

SEED HARVESTING: Seed can be harvested with standard combines. Harvest dates in Southwest Georgia are normally October 17-November 4.

The seed yield varies greatly depending on weather conditions from 27#/Ac to 166#/Ac.

At the Jimmy Carter PMC in Southwest Georgia the following combine settings are used for seed harvest.

<u>Concave</u>	<u>Cylinder Speed</u>	<u>RPM</u>	<u>Fan Setting</u>
¼”	1100-1200	Full Throttle = 2400 rpm	2

Screen Size

Top ¼ - 1/8” open
Bottom 1/3” open

DISEASE AND INSECTS: This cultivar does not have any particular resistance to disease or insects beyond those commonly found in the species.

WHERE TO GET HELP: For more information about Americus, contact Donald Surrency, Plant Materials Specialist, Thomson, Georgia, 706-595-1339. E-mail don.surrency@gathomson.fsc.usda.gov. Mike Owsley, Jimmy Carter PMC, Americus, Georgia, 912-924-4499. E-mail mike.owsley@gaamericu2.fsc.usda.gov.

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