

PLANTING GUIDE

Schizachyrium scoparium, Michx.

Common Name:
little bluestem

Accession Numbers:

9062319 Zone-1, Northern Iowa Germplasm

9062320 Zone-2, Central Iowa Germplasm

9062321 Zone-3, Southern Iowa Germplasm

Description:

Little bluestem is a medium tall, native perennial warm-season bunch type grass with coarse stems at basal leaves. It is easily mistaken for common broomsedge. Little bluestem has flat bluish basal shoots, which are somewhat bulbous. Plants are green, but often purplish at base of stem and entire plant has a reddish cast after frost. Leaves tend to fold with maturity. Seed heads are in the form of racemes about three inches long. The raceme stems are hairy. Plants are slender to robust, compress, 50 to 150 cm. tall, erect, the upper half freely branching; sheaths and blades commonly glabrous or nearly so, frequently sparsely pilose at their junction, rarely pubescent to villous throughout, the blades 3 to 6 mm. wide, flat; raceme 3 to 6 cm. long, mostly curved, the filiform peduncles mostly wholly or partly included in the sheaths, commonly spreading, the rachis slender, flexuous, pilose, sometimes copiously so; sessile spikelet mostly 6 to 8 mm. long, scabrous, the awn 8 to 15 mm. long; pedicellate spikelet usually reduced, short-awned, spreading, the pedicel pilose. It develops full stands where moisture is sufficient, but gets clumpy on drier sites. It has value as a persistent low maintenance cover plant and as a summer forage plant.

Little bluestem occurs in prairies, glades, rocky open woods, abandoned fields, sandy open ground, waste places, and along railroads. It ranges from New Brunswick and Quebec to Alberta, south to Florida, Texas, and Arizona.

Purpose:

Little bluestem can be used in the following situations: range seedings, pasture seedings, prairie restoration, prairie landscaping and wildlife and cover.

Source:

Seed of these accessions (9062319, 9062320, and 9062321) were collected from native stands located respectively in the northern, central and southern parts of the state of Iowa.



Establishment:

Prepare a clean weed free seedbed by disking and harrowing. Firm the seedbed by cultipacking. Seedbed should be firm enough to allow the seed to be planted 1/4 inch deep. Planting can be made using a grass drill with a fluffy seedbox. A billion seeder works well in the seeding operation, although other types of seeders or drills may be used provided debarbed seed is used. Plants are cross-pollinated; to prevent crossing, plant 900 to 1,000 feet. Little bluestem grows well on deep to shallow, sandy to fine-textured and rocky soils. Seed can be planted in the spring or fall. The seedlings are vigorous; therefore, new plantings can be established quickly. It is ordinarily ready for harvest from September in the South to October in the Northern part of the region.

Fertilizer:

Apply no fertilizer the establishment year unless soil test indicates a severe deficiency of potassium and/or phosphorus. Use no nitrogen during the establishment year as this can encourage weed competition.

Seeding Rates:

Seeding rates for little bluestem should be about 7 - 10 pounds of pure live seed (PLS) per acre for pasture planting. There are approximately 270,000 clean seeds in one pound of little bluestem. Generally little bluestem is one component of a range mix, so rate varies depending on percent desired in the stand.

Seeding Dates:

Spring (May to June), or a fall dormant seeding (November to March).

Management:

Reduce weed competition by mowing at a height that will not affect the little bluestem seedlings during the establishment year or use Plateau herbicide following the label recommendation. NOTE: These herbicide products may not be registered on this grass species in your state.

References

Manual of the Grasses of the United States; pp. 753-755, Hitchcock, A. S., United States Department of Agriculture, Washington, DC, 1951.

Forages; p. 514, Hughes H. D.; Heath, M. E.; Metcalfe, D. S., The Iowa State College Press, Ames, Iowa, 1951.

Flora of Missouri; p. 244; Steyermark, J. A.; Iowa State University Press, Ames, Iowa, 1968.

Badlands Ecotype Little Bluestem, United States Department of Agriculture, Natural Resources Conservation Service, Plant Materials Center, Bismarck, North Dakota, 1997.

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