

PLANTING GUIDE

Schizachyrium scoparium, Michx.

Common Name:
little bluestem

Accession Number/Release:

9079004 Zone -1, Northern Missouri 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.



The Manual of Grasses of the U.S.
A. S. Hitchcock

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 this accession (9079004) was collected from native stands located in Missouri counties north of the Missouri River.

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. Plants are cross-pollinated, so to prevent crossing, plant 1000 feet away from other little bluestems. Little bluestem grows well on deep to shallow, sandy to fine-textured and rocky soils. The seedlings are vigorous; therefore, new plantings can be established quickly.

Seed yields are good and can be readily harvested with a combine. Yields of 150–200 pounds per acre have been commonly harvested on managed stands. Seed harvest lasts from September to October.

Fertilizer:

Apply no fertilizer the establishment year unless soil test indicates a low deficiency of less than 15 PPM of phosphorus and or less than 90 PPM of potassium. Use no nitrogen during the establishment year as this can encourage weed competition.

Seeding Rates:

(For seed production) Seeding rates for little bluestem should be about seven-ten pounds of pure live seed (PLS) per acre in 30 inch rows. There are approximately 270,000 clean seeds in one pound of little bluestem.

For solid stand production, drill three times the seeding rate of row production to maintain 40 PLS per square foot.

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 or cultivating between the rows of the little bluestem. For grassy weed control usage of a post grass herbicide can provide weeds control and will encourage a good stand. Use label recommendation for application.

NOTE: Herbicide products may not be registered on this grass species in your state. NRCS does not endorse the use of any product.

Availability of Plant Materials:

Breeders' material is being produced in limited supply by the Plant Materials Center, located at Elsberry, Missouri.

Source identified seed will be released to interested commercial seed growers.

A list of commercial growers can be obtained from the Elsberry Plant Materials Center.

4/24/00

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.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) prohibits discrimination in its programs on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, religion, age, disability, political beliefs, and marital or familial status. (Not all prohibited bases apply to all programs.) Persons with disabilities who require alternative means for communication of program information (Braille, large print, audio tape, etc.) should contact the USDA's TARGET Center at 1-202-720-2600 (Voice and TDD).

To file a complaint, write the Secretary of Agriculture, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D.C. 20250, or call 1-800-245-6340 (voice) or 1-202-720-127 (TDD). USDA is an equal opportunity employer.