

SILVER BLUESTEM

Bothriochloa saccharoides

(Sw.) Rydb.

Plant Symbol = BOSA

Contributed By: USDA NRCS National Plant Data Center



From Hitchcock (1950)
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Alternate Name

Andropogon saccharoides

Uses

Silver bluestem is used primarily for grazing. Cattle graze it a few weeks in the spring, but little after the seedheads form. It can be grazed some during the winter if livestock are fed a protein supplement. Goats relish the seedheads when seed is in the dough stage. This grass is usually not seeded nor managed to control erosion on critical areas, but established itself readily on denuded soils and overgrazed ranges.

Status

Please consult the PLANTS Web site and your State Department of Natural Resources for this plant's current status, such as, state noxious status and wetland indicator values.

Description

Grass Family (Poaceae). Silver bluestem is a native, warm-season, short-lived perennial bunch grass. The height is between 2 to 3 feet. The leaf blade is 2 to 8 inches long. The stems are round at the base, but sometimes branching at nodes. The lower part is purplish throughout the growing season and usually has a ring of white hairs at the nodes. Stems turn irregularly at each node. The seedhead is a raceme that is silky white soon after it emerges from the sheath.

Distribution: For current distribution, please consult the Plant Profile page for this species on the PLANTS Web site.

Management

It is cut for hay only when associated with other grasses, such as little (*Schizachyrium scoparium*) and big bluestem (*Andropogon gerardii*). This grass increases on ranges that are grazed continuously. It is an invader on ranges in poor condition. Range managed to maintain this grass in the plant community should be grazed no more than 50 percent of the current year's growth and grazing should be deferred 45 to 60 days in the spring every 2 to 3 years.

Establishment

Growth starts in the spring when daily temperature is 70 to 75 degrees F. The seedheads emerge 3 to 4 weeks later with the seeds ripening during a 4- to 6-week period. Silver bluestem is a prolific seed producer. It grows best on loamy soils underlain by limestone. It grows well on clays and clay loams throughout the blackland resource areas of the South. Further west, it grows on rocky slopes and coarser textured soils. It does not grow well on moist sites.

Cultivars, Improved and Selected Materials (and area of origin)

Please contact your local NRCS Field Office.

Reference

Leithead, H.L., L.L. Yarlett, & T.N. Shiflett. 1976.
100 native forage grasses in 11 southern states.
USDA SCS *Agriculture Handbook No. 389*,
Washington, DC.

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For more information about this and other plants, please contact
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