

PLANTING GUIDE

Sorghastrum nutans (L.) Nash.

Common Name:
yellow indiagrass

Accession Numbers/Releases:

9079036 Zone – 1, Northern Missouri Germplasm

9079037 Zone – 2, Western Missouri Germplasm

Description:

Indiangrass is a tall, warm-season perennial native grass which grows 2 ½ to 6 feet tall. Sometimes as much as 8 feet.

Indiangrass is found throughout the prairie area, especially in conjunction with the bluestems. It generally favors more Mesic sites than those preferred by big bluestem. Early growth resembles that of big bluestem, but it is generally a lighter green. Stems are stout, erect, and unbranched. They are smooth except for a covering of soft, silky, golden hairs at the nodes. The extensive root system produces short, scaly rhizomes as one means of reproduction. The leaves usually less than 2 feet long, are rather stiff and straight. Spreading from the stem at about a 45° angle, the leaves are about ¼ to more than ½ inch wide, narrowing where they join the sheath. Leaves are rough to the touch and have a whitish bloom. Leaf sheaths tend to be smooth, although the lower ones may be slightly hairy. The ligule (the collar formed by the joining of the leaf blade and the leaf sheath) usually extends less than 1/8 inch upward. It forms a clawlike projection, a characteristic of the species that is sometimes referred to as being “similar to a rifle sight.” The conspicuous yellow anthers give the 4-12 inch long flower heads a yellowish appearance. Within the head are numerous individual branches 2 to 4 inches long. Each branch is erect, becoming nodding at the tip as the seeds mature. Spikelets develop along each ranch. Fertile spikelets 1/4 to 1/3 inch long have two outer glumes. These glossy bronze-colored glumes have fawn-colored hairs. The fertile spikelet is tipped with an awn about three times as long as the spikelet itself. The awn has a slight bend; it is closely spiraled from the base to the bend and loosely twisted toward the tip. Opposite each fertile spikelet is a rudimentary one, often just a tiny, hair stalk



Purpose: Indiangrass can be used in the following situations: roadside plantings, range seedings, pasture seedings, prairie restoration, prairie landscaping, wildlife cover, and as a border for wildflower gardens because of its showy appearance.

Source: Seed of the accession 9079036 (Zone 1) was collected from native stands located in counties North of the Missouri River. Accession 9079037 was collected from native stands located in western Missouri counties (Zone 2).

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 ¼ inch deep. Indiangrass can also be no-tilled into sod or crop stubble using appropriate no-till equipment and chemical programs. Planting can be made using a grass drill with a seed box designed for fluffy seed. A brilliant 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, so for seed production, to prevent crossing, plant 900 to 1,000 feet from other varieties or accessions.

Indiangrass grows well on deep to shallow, sandy to fine-textured and rocky soils. Seed can be planted in the spring or a dormant seeding can be made in the fall or winter. 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 Midwest region.

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

Seeding Rates: Seeding rates for Indiangrass should be about 7-10 pounds of pure live seed (PLS) per acre for pasture planting. There are approximately 175,000 clean seeds in one pound of debarbed seed. Indiangrass is a major component of a range mix, so seeding 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 Indiangrass seedlings during the establishment year or use Plateau herbicide and follow the label recommendation for this species. Burning established fields in April will reduce competition and encourage seed heads to fill.

NOTE: Some herbicide products may not be registered on this grass species in your state or province.

References

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Prairie Plants of Illinois; pp. 228-229; Voigt, John W. and Mohlenbrock, Robert H.; both from Southern Illinois University, Edwardsville, Illinois.

The Prairie Garden, 70 Native Plants You Can Grow in Town and Country; pp. 19, 26, 186-187; Smith, J. Robert and Smith, Beatrice S., University of Wisconsin Press, Madison, Wisconsin 1980.

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