

Little Bluestem: *Schizachyrium scoparium*



Cultivation: The preference is full sun and mesic to dry conditions. Different kinds of soil are tolerated, including those that contain clay-loam, gravel, or sand. Less fertile soil is preferred because of the reduced competition from taller vegetation. Because of its C4 metabolism, Little Bluestem develops primarily during the warm weather of summer and early fall, and it has excellent drought resistance. Habitats include hill prairies, gravel prairies, sand prairies, black soil prairies, clay prairies, scrubby barrens, rocky slopes of thinly wooded bluffs, sandy savannas, hilltop glades (limestone, sandstone, or shale), sand dunes, gravelly areas along railroads, and abandoned fields. Little Bluestem is often used in prairie restorations and it is occasionally found in gardens as an ornamental grass. In Illinois, this is one of the dominant grasses of hill prairies. The Field Sparrow, Tree Sparrow, Slate-Colored Junco, and other small songbirds eat the seeds, particularly during the winter. The foliage of Little Bluestem is quite palatable to bison, cattle, and other hoofed mammalian herbivores.

Plant Structure: This native perennial grass is 2-3' tall and tufted at the base. The blooming period occurs from late summer into the fall. Each fertile spikelet produces a single elongated grain. The root system is fibrous and rhizomatous. Tight bunches of culms and leaves are produced from the short rhizomes. The culms and leaves become various shades of tan, brown, or wine-red during the fall and winter. Little Bluestem is an attractive prairie grass, particularly during the fall. While the stems of other grasses become matted during the winter, the stems of Little Bluestem remain conspicuously upright.

