Switch Grass:
Panicum virgatum

Cultivation: The preference is partial to full sunlight, moist to mesic conditions, and deep fertile soil. However, this robust grass can tolerate practically any kind of soil and it will adapt to drier conditions. This grass can spread aggressively, therefore it should not be overplanted. Habitats include black soil prairies, clay prairies, sand prairies, typical savannas and sandy savannas, open woodlands, rocky bluffs, sand dunes, marshes and sandy pannes, rocky banks of rivers, prairie restorations, areas along railroads and roadsides, and abandoned fields. Because of its above-average tolerance of salt, this species can become the dominant grass along little-mowed roadsides where salt is applied during the winter. Like other prairie species, this native grass recovers readily from occasional wildfires. The seeds of Switch Grass are eaten by a variety of birds, including wetland birds, upland gamebirds, and granivorous songbird. When Switch Grass occurs near marshes, it is a food plant of the Muskrat. The young foliage of this grass is eaten by hoofed mammalian herbivores, including deer, horses, cattle, sheep, and goats. Because Switch Grass remains upright during the winter and often forms large clumps, it provides good cover for various birds and small mammals during this time of year.

Plant Structure: This native perennial grass is 3-6' tall and more or less erect; it usually grows in large bunches. The culms are light to medium green, terete, glabrous, and fairly stout; each culm has several alternate leaves that span most of its length underneath the inflorescence. This inflorescence is an airy panicle of spikelets. The blooming period occurs during mid-summer. Pollination of the florets is by wind. The floret of each spikelet is replaced by a grain that is 2-3 mm. long; this grain is ovoid-oblong in shape and somewhat flattened on one side. The root system is fibrous and rhizomatous; the fibrous roots can penetrate more than 10 ft. in the ground. Reproduction is by seed and vegetatively through rhizomes