

ORNAMENTAL GRASSES

for Central Mississippi



Ornamental grasses can add texture, year-round color, and wildlife habitat in the landscape, but they are often underused in Mississippi. A wide variety of ornamental grasses grow well in Mississippi and require very little care. Only a few types are regularly planted, with pampas (*Cortaderia selloana*) and muhly (*Muhlenbergia capillaris*) being the most popular.

Their lack of popularity is likely linked to their obscurity. Consumers often gravitate to familiar plant material. Additionally, grasses do not typically produce seed heads (plumes) in the spring when the bulk of plant material is sold; therefore, they are not as showy and go unnoticed while plants that are in full bloom are sold in much higher numbers.

Grasses create useful and interesting landscape design elements, particularly by providing unique textures and movement in the landscape that cannot be achieved with other plants. They are particularly attractive during the morning and evening hours when sunlight passes through the plumes and blades, giving them a glowing appearance (**Figure 1**).



Figure 1. *Muhlenbergia capillaris* 'White Cloud' in the morning light.

It is hard not to notice the large, cream-colored plumes of pampas grass or the pink plumes of pink muhly grass in the late summer and fall. They stand out nicely in the landscape and are very showy. Other grasses are not as showy, and these can be used as filler plants to create a backdrop that accentuates other flowering plants in the landscape. This happens when grasses are paired with plants that have a more formal or neat appearance.

For example, grasses such as *Pennisetum 'Cassian'* nicely complement coneflower, elephant ear, hydrangea, and hardy hibiscus because the large leaves and flowers provide a formal look that contrasts nicely with grasses. The contrast in texture and form add to the overall beauty of the landscape (Figure 2). Grasses also add a natural element to the landscape and can be reminiscent of a natural prairie landscape (Figure 3).



Figure 2. Grasses provide an interesting contrast of texture and form when planted with other landscape plants.



Figure 3. Ornamental grasses planted in a naturalistic design are reminiscent of a prairie.

Ornamental grasses are not just attractive; they provide many benefits to the environment. For example, root systems, particularly of perennial grasses, can grow into thick mats that prevent soil erosion. Studies have shown that erosion is reduced by at least 90 percent compared to bare soils (Gray and Sotri, 1996). Many grasses form deep root systems that can filter water percolating through soils, which helps keep groundwater cleaner. Over time, they also contribute to the organic matter of soils and loosen heavy soils. Grasses are also important for wildlife, including pollinators like butterflies, because they provide shelter and food; therefore, incorporating grasses into landscapes can help improve animal diversity.

Growth habits of ornamental grasses differ. Some are strictly upright, while others gracefully drape downward (Figure 4). Some grasses spread horizontally



Figure 4. Ornamental grasses have different growth habits, some growing straight up and others gracefully draping downward.

through underground rhizomes, while others remain as a clump. Both types will grow wider with time, but those that spread through underground rhizomes can fill a much larger area in a shorter period. This characteristic can even cause some grasses to become invasive and problematic for other plants. Clumping and spreading grasses are typically used differently in the landscape. Clumping grasses are used to create a more formal look within the landscape, while those that spread are used for a more natural look or in areas with soil erosion issues.

In the turf industry, grasses are often divided into two groups called warm-season and cool-season grasses. When the temperature is warm, photosynthesis shuts down in cool-season grasses; these are generally better adapted to northern states and grow well during cooler months when temperatures are 60–75°F. Their growth typically begins in late winter and early spring. As temperatures rise, growth slows down, and some cool-season grasses even go dormant in the summer or die out completely.

Warm-season grasses can continue photosynthesis in the summer when temperatures are 75–90°F, but they usually take longer to break dormancy in the spring. Additionally, most warm-season grasses go dormant after the first cold frost. Most ornamental grasses grown in Mississippi are warm-season grasses.

There are other types of plants that look like grass and are sold in the trade as ornamental grasses, but these technically belong to different families. These grass-like options mostly include sedges (*Carex*), lilyturf (*Liriope*), mondograss (*Ophiopogon*), and rushes (*Juncus*). These plants are evergreen and do not senesce (die down to the ground) during the winter or summer.

Sometimes their evergreen leaves are damaged at the tips during the winter and can be trimmed back, but, if they are not damaged, they do not need to be trimmed at all. Because they are generally low to the ground, it is even possible to mow these grass-like plants to remove damaged leaves in the early spring. Generally, leaves can be removed from these evergreen plants easily using a leaf blower or rake.

In recent years, breeding and selection efforts of individuals and companies have expanded the availability of grasses (Figure 5). Even some grass-like plants have been added (Figure 6). This has improved the diversity of what is available for purchase as well as expanded how the grasses can be used within the landscape.

For example, one of the most diverse genera of ornamental grasses, *Pennisetum*, ranges dramatically in size, from 'Little Bunny' that grows just 9 inches to 'Black Stockings' that can reach over 9 feet. This



Figure 5. *Stipa* 'Angel Hair' on display at the 2018 California Spring Trials (CAST). CAST is an annual showcase of new products that are going to be introduced by ornamental plant development companies.



Figure 6. *Carex* 'Feather Falls' is a tough evergreen option that tolerates both shade and full sun.

means that they can be used in different places within the landscape, such as the front of a flowerbed or as a backdrop. They also vary in winter hardiness, leaf color, and plume size (Figure 7).

Maintenance Requirements

Ornamental grass care is relatively simple and requires little time. Most warm-season, perennial grasses are herbaceous, meaning that they do not form



Figure 7. *Pennisetum* plume diversity. Cultivars from left to right: 'Little Bunny', 'Hameln', 'Piglet', 'Cassian', 'Karley Rose', and 'Red Head'.

woody stems and the aboveground tissue will senesce each winter. Even though the aboveground tissue will turn tan or brown and dry out, the roots will remain alive, but dormant, until the following spring.

Even though they are not green, desiccated leaves and plumes remain attractive in the landscape during the winter months. In late winter or early spring, cut them to the ground to remove the brown, dead growth. Hedge pruners or pruning shears often work well for this task. If this is not done early enough, new growth will emerge and start to grow into the senesced part of the grass. This makes it nearly impossible to remove only the dead plant material without also trimming the new growth.

Ornamental grasses form many crowns at their base after they have been planted for a few seasons. This causes the grass clump to expand over the years, several feet in diameter in some cases, to a point that it is too large for the location in which it was planted. To remedy this problem, dig the clump from the soil, and divide the crown (where the roots and the leaves meet) for replanting. This is similar to the process that is used for perennials like black-eyed Susan, hosta, or daylily.

Generally, ornamental grasses do not require fertilizer. In some cases, fertilizer will result in excessive, weaker growth, which is more susceptible to lodging. This is especially true after seed heads form on grass-

es, such as the large cultivars of *P. virgatus*. Heavy rains and winds can devastate large clumps, causing them to collapse and look unsightly in the landscape. This can even happen when grasses are planted in rich, fertile soils where nitrogen is in abundance.

Grasses do not have many disease or pest problems in Mississippi. They are typically left untouched by deer. Most diseases are a result of excessive moisture. For example, heavy rainfall and cooler temperatures that are typical during the early spring can cause a rust outbreak (*Puccinia* spp.), especially if those conditions continue over an extended period. Grasses that are infected with rust develop small, reddish-orange spots or patches along the blades of grass. The severity of the outbreak depends on the environment and the type of grass; some grasses are more resistant to rust than others.

Plants with rust can be sprayed with fungicides, but because rust spores die during warm summer months and rarely cause the grass to die, treatment is typically not necessary. For grasses that develop chronic outbreaks of rust each year, it would be better to replace them with grasses that are more resistant. Rust spores are dispersed by the wind, so the disease spreads easily. Monitor grasses early for signs of the disease; carefully remove infected leaves, place them in a bag, and destroy them.

Because rust tends to be host-specific, it will not infect other non-related plants around it. For example, rust on ornamental grasses will not spread to nearby oaks, nor will oak rust spread to ornamental grasses. Pests are typically not a problem in Mississippi. Although grasses are susceptible to aphids and spider mites, these pests cause minimal damage and usually do not need to be treated.

Hundreds of ornamental grasses are available for purchase. Growers at the Truck Crops Experiment Station in Crystal Springs, Mississippi (USDA hardiness zone 8b) trialed more than 40 cultivars from more than a dozen genera. Plants were grown in raised boxes to improve water drainage, and many of the grasses performed very well without any major issues. The most problematic issue was rust, but it was not bad enough to cause the plants to be unattractive. The only other

problem was that, despite being in raised beds, *Festuca* had some root rot issues.

All grasses were supplied as deep, 2-inch plugs. To allow the grasses to establish quickly and prevent root-bound problems, researchers trimmed the outer ¼-inch of each root ball. Researchers evaluated the

plants every 2 weeks for performance during the growing season. They took measurements of the leaves and plumes and noted blooming times. For landscaping purposes, it is important to remember that these plants grow wider over time. We anticipate that grasses with a longer establishment time will have wider widths than those provided below.

***ANDROPOGON gerardii* — Big Bluestem, Turkeyfoot**
(an-droe-POE-gon jer-AR-dee-eye)

This plant is native to the Midwestern prairies of the U.S. It is highly adaptable to many soil types and soil moistures. It does well in soils with low fertility. The common name, turkeyfoot, comes from the seed heads, which resemble turkey feet.

‘Red October’

This is a nice selection that maintains a deep red/maroon color at the tips of the blades. It turns a deep red color in the fall. When using this cultivar in the landscape, it is important to note the difference in blade height and bloom height. It is not until July that the blooms start to form, and the plant gains several feet in size. This can limit where it can be planted in the landscape.

Zone: 3–9
Bloom height: 60 in.
Blade height: 11 in.
Spread: 6 in.
Light exposure: Sun
Bloom time: Early July
Growth cycle: Warm
Water: Dry to medium

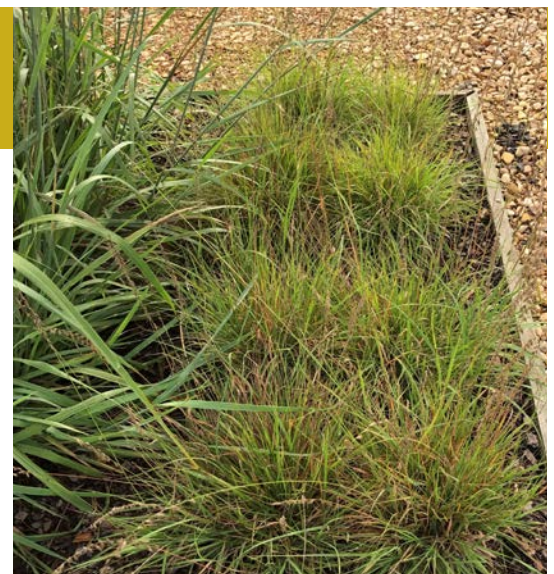
***BOUTELOUA* — Grama**
(boo-tuh-LOO-ah)

While this genus is adaptable to many different soil types, it does not do as well in Mississippi in areas where the soil does not readily drain.

Light exposure: Sun
Growth cycle: Warm
Water: Dry

***B. curtipendula* — Sideoats Grama**
(cur-tih-PEN-dyoo-lah)

This rhizomatous grass spreads horizontally, making it a particularly good candidate for areas suffering from soil erosion. It has attractive,



pink-hued flower spikes. Mass plantings make a larger impact in the landscape than small plantings.

Zone: 4 to 9
Bloom height: 36 in.
Blade height: 11 in.
Spread: 2 in.
Bloom time: Late June

B. gracilis — **Blue Grama**
(grah-SIL-iss)

This native grass is often used as forage. It has an unusual seed head that can resemble the teeth of a comb. It was a slow-growing grass in our trials and seemed to struggle some. Additionally, it produced very few seed heads. With more time, performance may improve.

Zone: 3 to 9
Bloom height: 12 in.
Blade height: 7 in.
Spread: 8 in.
Bloom time: Early July



CALAMAGROSTIS brachytricha — **Korean Feather Reed Grass**
(kal-uh-muh-GRah-stis brack-ee-TRY-kuh)

This genus contains a very popular grass, 'Karl Foerster'. But unlike 'Karl Foerster', which is a hybrid between two other Calamagrostis species, this grass thrives in the shade and has a softer seed head. Unfortunately, this grass never formed seed heads in our trial, but the blades cascaded nicely and were soft. It may flower after having more time to become established in the landscape. It would look very nice planted with begonias, hostas, and coleus.

Zone: 4 to 9
Bloom height: N/A
Blade height: 12 in.
Spread: 12 in.
Light exposure: Part sun to shade
Bloom time: N/A
Growth cycle: Warm
Water: Dry



CAREX — Sedge

(KARE-ex)

While not a true grass, *Carex* varieties are great additions to the ornamental grass catalog. There are more than 1,500 species with a lot of diversity.

The ones included in our trial were evergreen and thrived in the shade. Despite being cool-season, most of the cultivars remained very healthy year-round. Cold weather can cause some of the tips to turn brown, and these may need to be pruned away in the spring. Sedge seed heads are typically not very showy, but they have a nice, cascading habit that forms attractive clumps in the landscape. They pair well with coleus, hostas, browallia, and plectranthus.

Light exposure: Part shade to shade
Growth cycle: Cool

C. divulsa — Grassland Sedge

(dih-VUL-sah)

This species has one of the showiest seed heads of the sedges we trialed. It also has a shiny, dark-green blade that gives it a formal appearance. This species did not form seed heads during the trial period, but they might form after more years of establishment.

Zone: 5 to 9
Bloom height: N/A
Blade height: 9 in.
Spread: 12 in.
Bloom time: Late spring
Water: Dry to moist



C. eburnea — Bristle-leaf Sedge

(e-BUR-nea)

This tiny sedge did not perform well. It did not grow much, and we had some plants rot during the trial.

Zone: 2 to 8
Bloom height: N/A
Blade height: 3 in.
Spread: 4 in.
Bloom time: N/A
Water: Medium



C. flacca — **Blue Sedge**
(FLAK-kah)

This species has attractive, blue-green leaves and slowly spreads by rhizomes. It can be used to reduce erosion in shaded areas. The seed heads are tan and contrast with the leaves but are not as showy as other grasses. This species is drought-tolerant once established.

'Blue Zinger'

This cultivar is larger and more upright than most *C. flacca* plants.

Zone: 4 to 8
Bloom height: 10 in.
Blade height: 8 in.
Spread: 15 in.
Bloom time: April
Water: Dry



C. oshimensis
(oh-shi-MEN-sis)

'EverColor Everest'

This colorful sedge has an attractive blue-white variegation. It brightens shady places and has an attractive mounding shape. It performs well in pots, too. It is drought-tolerant and can tolerate moist soils, but it does not do well in waterlogged soils. Be sure to plant it in the shade to avoid stress from excessive summer heat.

Zone: 6 to 8
Bloom height: N/A
Blade height: 6 in.
Spread: 13 in.
Bloom time: N/A
Water: Dry to moist



'EverColor Everlime'

This cultivar is similar to Everest but has lime-green and dark-green variegation.

Zone: 6 to 8
Bloom height: N/A
Blade height: 8 in.
Spread: 15 in.
Bloom time: N/A
Water: Dry to moist



C. rosea — **Rosy Sedge, Curly Wood Sedge**
(ROW-see-ah)

This North American native species is often found growing near streams. It spreads very slowly through rhizomes but can naturalize over time.

Zone: 3 to 9
Bloom height: N/A
Blade height: 8 in.
Spread: 11 in.
Bloom time: N/A
Water: Dry to moist



C. vulpinoidea — **Fox Sedge**
(vul-pin-OY-dee-uh)

This native sedge is found in water-logged and seasonally moist soils. It can thrive in full sun to shade. In the right location, it can spread quickly through rhizomes. It is attractive when planted near water features and helps reduce soil erosion.

Zone: 3 to 8
Bloom height: N/A
Blade height: 12 in.
Spread: 14 in.
Bloom time: N/A
Water: Medium



ERAGROSTIS elliotii — **Lovegrass**
(er-uh-GROS-tis el-ee-OT-ee-eye)

‘Wind Dancer’

This native grass has a delicate appearance in the landscape. The blades and seed heads are thin and move readily in the wind. They arch well to form a mound. They have an extensive root system and are drought-tolerant.

Zone: 6 to 9
Bloom height: 45 in.
Blade height: 19 in.
Spread: 30 in.
Light exposure: Sun
Bloom time: Early July
Growth cycle: Warm
Water: Medium



***FESTUCA glauca* — Blue Fescue**
(fess-TOO-kah GLOK-ah)

'Beyond Blue'

Blue fescue is a cool-season grass with stunningly bright-blue blades that can be particularly attractive when planted in a large mass. They bloom in the spring; however, they never bloomed during the trial period in Mississippi. They must be planted in well-drained soil and might best be relegated to a pot in this area of the country. By the end of the trial, all the plants died out.

Zone: 4 to 8
Bloom height: N/A
Blade height: 5 in.
Spread: 7 in.
Light exposure: Sun
Bloom time: N/A
Growth cycle: Cool
Water: Dry to medium



***JUNCUS effusus* — Common Rush**
(JUNK-us eh-FEW-zus)

This evergreen, grass-like, native plant stands out nicely in the landscape, particularly during the winter months. It has the appearance of being sharp, but it is not painful to touch. The seed heads are brown but not showy. Prune out any brown or dead blades as needed.

Zone: 4 to 10
Bloom height: N/A
Blade height: 48 in.
Spread: 26 in.
Light exposure: Sun
Bloom time: July
Water: Wet



***MISCANTHUS* — Maiden Grass**
(mis-KAN-thus)

This grass is native to Asian countries and has been invasive in some regions of the U.S. No major outbreaks have been reported to date in Mississippi, but it may be possible in the future. Breeding efforts have been focused on developing cultivars with little to no seed set to prevent escape into the native landscape.

'My Fair Maiden'

This sterile cultivar was developed at North Carolina State University. It has been reported to reach up to 9 feet tall. The plumes are very showy but don't develop until late in the year.

Zone: 5 to 9
Bloom height: 76 in.
Blade height: 36 in.
Spread: 48 in.
Light exposure: Sun
Bloom time: Early October
Growth cycle: Warm
Water: Dry to medium



NASSELLA tenuissima — Feathergrass (nas-SEL-lah ten-yew-ISS-ih-mah)

This cool-season grass has one of the finest textures of any grass. It is native to the Southwestern U.S., as well as Argentina and Mexico. It was very slow-growing in our trials and never seemed to thrive, and it never developed seed heads. It would likely perform much better in a pot where it can be sheltered from excessive rain and soil drainage can be optimized. This grass went dormant during the summer heat in central Mississippi.

Zone: 7 to 10
Bloom height: N/A
Blade height: 9 in.
Spread: 3 in.
Light exposure: Sun
Bloom time: N/A
Growth cycle: Cool
Water: Dry



PANICUM — Switchgrass (PAN-ih-kum)

Panicum is one of the major genera of North American prairies. They have extremely deep root systems that provide them with tolerance to drought and poor soil fertility. These grasses could potentially be a native substitute for nonnative *Miscanthus* grasses.

Light exposure: Sun
Growth cycle: Warm

P. amarum
(ah-MAR-um)

This species is found natively along the coastline of the eastern U.S. It is tolerant of salt sprays, sandy soils, and heat. It is tolerant of dry, nutrient-depleted soils but will flourish on fertile, well-drained soils.

'Dewey Blue'

This cultivar has an attractive blue-green hue with tan seed heads. It performed well throughout the growing season and maintained good form. It would be relatively easy to landscape with this variety.

Zone:	2 to 9
Bloom height:	55 in.
Blade height:	31 in.
Spread:	36 in.
Bloom time:	Early June
Water:	Dry to medium



P. virgatum
(ver-gā'-tum)

This species is found mostly east of the Rocky Mountains and from Canada to Mexico in a diverse range of growing conditions, demonstrating its adaptability.

'Cape Breeze'

This cultivar is thought to be an interspecific hybrid between *P. virgatum* and an unknown *Panicum* species. It is more compact than other *P. virgatum* cultivars on the market.

Zone:	4 to 9
Bloom height:	43 in.
Blade height:	32 in.
Spread:	18 in.
Bloom time:	Late June
Water:	Dry to medium



'Cloud Nine'

This large, vigorous *P. virgatum* cultivar grows above 8 feet. To avoid lodging, it should not be planted in fertile soils or fertilized. This cultivar would be a great backdrop to shrubs and bedding plants.

Zone:	4 to 9
Bloom height:	102 in.
Blade height:	92 in.
Spread:	71 in.
Bloom time:	Early July
Water:	Medium



'Dallas Blues'

The blades of this cultivar have a blue-green hue and are wider than other *P. virgatum* cultivars, making it stand out from other ornamental grasses. The seed heads are also more substantial than other *Panicum* cultivars and create a nice show in the landscape.

Zone: 4 to 10
Bloom height: 73 in.
Blade height: 55 in.
Spread: 35 in.
Bloom time: Early July
Water: Dry to medium



'Northwind'

This upright cultivar would work very well as a vertical accent in a landscape. It has fine, clean, green foliage. The seed heads serve as a great backdrop to flowering plants.

Zone: 4 to 9
Bloom height: 43 in.
Blade height: 32 in.
Spread: 18 in.
Bloom time: Early July
Water: Dry



'Rotstrahlbusch'

This short *Panicum* cultivar forms a thick clump in a short period of time. Its name translates to "red ray bush." It has dark red blade tips and some dark red highlights on the seed heads.

Zone: 4 to 10
Bloom height: 33 in.
Blade height: 22 in.
Spread: 24 in.
Bloom time: Early June
Water: Dry to medium



'Shenandoah'

The red color of this cultivar is more pronounced than other cultivars, such as 'Rotstrahlbusch'. The red stands out in the landscape and would mix nicely with yellow or blue flowers.

Zone: 4 to 10
Bloom height: 44 in.
Blade height: 30 in.
Spread: 21 in.
Bloom time: Early June
Water: Dry to medium



'Squaw'

This cultivar is similar to 'Shenandoah' in form but has green foliage and seed heads.

Zone:	4 to 10
Bloom height:	39 in.
Blade height:	33 in.
Spread:	13 in.
Bloom time:	Late June
Water:	Dry to medium



'Thundercloud'

This is another giant *Panicum* cultivar. Like 'Cloud Nine', fertilizer should be avoided. The flower heads develop above the foliage, creating an attractive look in the landscape.

Zone:	4 to 9
Bloom height:	83 in.
Blade height:	48 in.
Spread:	24 in.
Bloom time:	Early July
Water:	Dry to medium



***Pennisetum* — Fountain Grass**

(pen-ih-SEE-tum)

This diverse genus has species that are native to many regions of the world, including Africa, Asia, and the U.S. They have attractive, bottlebrush-shaped plumes that come in a variety of sizes. The foliage colors are also diverse, ranging from green to deep red to variegated. They require well-drained soil and are very tolerant to humidity. They do not require much maintenance. All *Pennisetum* cultivars that were trialed maintained healthy leaves throughout the growing season until frost. There are some reports of *Pennisetum* escaping into the wild in Hawaii and Colorado; however, no reports have been made in Mississippi.

Light exposure:	Sun
Growth cycle:	Warm

P. alopecuroides

(al-low-peck-yer-roy-deez)

This species from Japan and East Asia forms arching clumps in the landscape, with the flower stalks developing above the foliage. It is tolerant of poor soils and thrives in the heat and sun.

'Cassian'

The white seed heads are very attractive and stand out from the green foliage.

Zone: 5 to 9
Bloom height: 32 in.
Blade height: 18 in.
Spread: 21 in.
Bloom time: Early July
Water: Dry



'Hameln'

This cultivar is smaller than 'Cassian', and the tan seed heads are slightly less prominent. This cultivar would work very well in a small landscape at the front of a bed mixed with colorful annuals.

Zone: 5 to 9
Bloom height: 18 in.
Blade height: 8 in.
Spread: 12 in.
Bloom time: Early July
Water: Dry



'Little Bunny'

This was the smallest *Pennisetum* cultivar in the trial and didn't get taller than a foot. Its small size makes it ideal to plant at the front of a flowerbed.

Zone: 6 to 9
Bloom height: 9 in.
Blade height: 4 in.
Spread: 11 in.
Bloom time: Late July
Water: Dry



'Piglet'

This variety was extremely similar in appearance to 'Hameln'. No characteristics were obviously unique.

Zone: 5 to 9
Bloom height: 18 in.
Blade height: 9 in.
Spread: 13 in.
Bloom time: Early July
Water: Medium



'Red Head'

This cultivar was one of the most attractive grasses in the entire trial. The large, pink, bottlebrush seed heads contrasted nicely with the clean, green foliage.

Zone: 5 to 9
Bloom height: 37 in.
Blade height: 28 in.
Spread: 31 in.
Bloom time: Late July
Water: Medium



P. orientale

(or-ee-en-TAL-ee)

'Karley Rose'

The pink seed heads of this cultivar are very attractive and long-lasting. It establishes quickly in the landscape.

Zone: 6 to 8
Bloom height: 38 in.
Blade height: 24 in.
Spread: 24 in.
Bloom time: Early July
Water: Dry



SCHIZACHYRIUM scoparium — Little Bluestem

(skiz-ah-KEER-ee-um sko-PAR-ee-um)

This species tends to have a strict, upright appearance in the landscape. The foliage ranges from green to blue to purple, and there are some attractive cultivars that have been released over the years. Many of them develop attractive red and bronze colors in the fall, but the seeds heads are not particularly showy compared to other grasses. It does very well in poor soils. Fertilizer should be avoided to prevent lodging.

Light exposure: Sun
Growth cycle: Warm

'Blaze'

This cultivar is known for its fall color and was originally developed in Nebraska in 1967 as a pasture grass.

Zone: 3 to 9
Bloom height: 38 in.
Blade height: 22 in.
Spread: 16 in.
Bloom time: N/A
Water: Dry



'Blue Heaven'

This is a sturdy variety with blue-green foliage. It stays upright well during the winter, even in the snow. It provides a habitat for several species of skipper butterflies.

Zone: 3 to 9
Bloom height: 36 in.
Blade height: 11 in.
Spread: 23 in.
Bloom time: N/A
Water: Dry



'Prairie Blues'

This cultivar was selected for its enduring blue-gray color. It seems less strictly upright than other cultivars.

Zone: 3 to 9
Bloom height: 37 in.
Blade height: 13 in.
Spread: 15 in.
Bloom time: Early July
Water: Dry



'Standing Ovation'

This attractive cultivar has a very strong, upright growth habit that can remain upright during heavy rains. The foliage is blue-green with red coloration at the tips. It also has nice fall color.

Zone: 3 to 8
Bloom height: 37 in.
Blade height: 16 in.
Spread: 15 in.
Bloom time: Late July
Water: Dry to medium



'The Blues'

This is another cultivar with nice, blue foliage. The stems can develop a red color with time. This variety is upright in appearance, but it can lodge if the soil is too fertile.

Zone: 3 to 9
Bloom height: 43 in.
Blade height: 13 in.
Spread: 19 in.
Bloom time: Early July
Water: Dry



'Twilight Zone'

Of the cultivars that were trialed, this one had the bluest, almost iridescent leaf coloration with deep-purple tips. It was much slower growing than other cultivars that were trialed. Unfortunately, it did not thrive during the trial period and may require more well-drained soil than other cultivars.

Zone: 3 to 9
Bloom height: 39 in.
Blade height: 16 in.
Spread: 4 in.
Bloom time: Late June
Water: Dry to medium



SORGHASTRUM nutans — Indian Grass

(sor-GAS-trum NOO-tanz)

This tall species is native to North American prairies. It develops very tall seed heads and provides food for wildlife. It is very drought-tolerant and should be planted at the back of the flowerbed. Avoid fertilizer to prevent lodging.

Light exposure: Sun
Growth cycle: Warm
Bloom time: Late June

'Indian Steel'

This selection has a blue-green color with tall, yellow seed heads. It tended to lodge during the end of the summer. (It would be best planted in soil with low fertility to restrict growth.) The seed heads were not nearly as showy as other tall ornamental grasses; however, these grasses are prized for their sustainability to wildlife.

Zone: 4 to 9
Bloom height: 80 in.
Blade height: 22 in.
Spread: 23 in.
Water: Dry to medium

'Sioux Blue'

This cultivar is similar to 'Indian Steel' but did not get quite as tall.

Zone: 4 to 9
Bloom height: 70 in.
Blade height: 22 in.
Spread: 19 in.
Water: Dry



***SPOROBOLUS* — Prairie Dropseed**
(spoor-OB-oh-lus)

This genus is native to the U.S. and makes up much of the Midwestern and Southwestern prairies.

Light exposure: Sun
Growth cycle: Warm

S. heterolepis
(het-er-oh-LEP-is)

This species has very finely textured leaves and develops many seed heads later in the season. As the clumps mature, the leaves may arch down, creating a more mounded grass appearance. It turns an attractive burnt-orange color in the fall.

Zone: 4 to 9
Bloom height: 33 in.
Blade height: 22 in.
Spread: 9 in.
Bloom time: Mid-August
Water: Dry



S. wrightii
(RITE-ee-eye)

This species remains semi-evergreen in mild climates. It develops many attractive seed heads and would be an excellent ornamental grass in the landscape. It can thrive in a variety of landscape settings.

Zone: 5 to 9
Bloom height: 70 in.
Blade height: 31 in.
Spread: 28 in.
Bloom time: Early July
Water: Dry to wet





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