NATIVE GRASSES

for Landscaping

OUR NATIVE grasses have often been overlooked as landscaping plants because most people aren't familiar with the graceful beauty of grasses. Here are brief descriptions of these plants to acquaint you with the sizes, shapes and colors. Unless noted, most are prairie grasses that grow in clumps, full sun and a wide range of soils-good characteristics for landscaping.

Plant taller grasses for a dramatic accent or in large meadow plantings. Shorter grasses are good backdrops to set off perennials in flower beds or work well in smaller meadow plantings. In winter, the warm reds, oranges and golds of native grasses become intensified when wet.



BIG BLUESTEM (Andropogon gerardii) is a dramatic 5-8 feet tall, clump-forming grass which grows in a wide range of soils. In mid-August, big blue produces its distinctive three-parted seed heads which resemble a turkey's foot; its other name. The bluish to purplish stems turn an attractive reddish-copper color after frost. Big bluestem occasionally topples in winter.

LITTLE BLUESTEM

(Schizachyrium scoparium) is the most widely used grass for landscaping wildflower beds and meadows, because it will not overshadow the wildflowers. The blue to green leaves and stems of the 2-4 foot grass turn the deepest russet of all the natives. This color, accented by silvery white seed heads in fall, is unforgettable.

INDIAN GRASS (Sorghastrum nutans) is another tall prairie grass growing 5 to 7 feet. Its distinction is a large golden silky plume which follows yellow flowers in late summer. Indian grass turns golden in fall.



PRAIRIE DROPSEED

(Sporobolus heterolepis) with its arching fine leaves can be thought of as a miniature fountain grass. This grass is considered by many as the most handsome of the prairie grasses. The seed heads, filled with small round seeds, are on 2' to 4' long stalks. Winter color is light tan.



prairi

broomsedge

wirginicus) and ELLIOTT'S

BROOMSEDGE (Andropogon
elliottil) are compact grasses
growing 2 to 3 feet tall that turn
orange in fall and remain standing
throughout the winter.

Broomsedge is commonly seen in
abandoned fields. The leaves of
Elliott's broomsedge around the
seed heads are wider than those of
broomsedge. Both prefer acid soil.

BROOMSEDGE (Andropogon

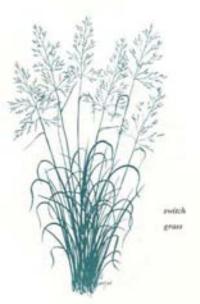
SPLITBEARD BLUESTEM

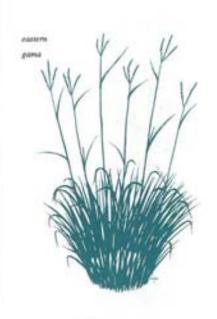
(Andropogon ternarius) during the summer looks very much like broomsedge, but in fall turns a rich russet which remains colorful through winter like little bluestem. The fluffy silver seed heads are scattered over the length of each stem and make this an outstanding ornamental grass.



SWITCH GRASS (Panicum

virganum) is another of the major prairie grasses and turns golden yellow in the fall. It is the most resistant of the native grasses to ice and snow. When purchasing switch grass, choose the native rather than the more aggressive cultivated varieties such as cave-inrock, Kanlow or Blackwell. Native switch grass grows 2 to 3 feet with large loose seed heads. Switch grass typically grows in wetter soils, but is found in all but the driest of soils.





EASTERN GAMA (Tripascum dacryloides) plants form large circles with broad leaves. When planted close together, eastern gama makes an impressive hedge or screen. Its unusual seed heads look like a primitive sort of corn. The large seeds are atop of 4 to 8 feet stalks. This grass turns an orange-pink in the fall. The foliage "melts" down forming small hummocks over winter.

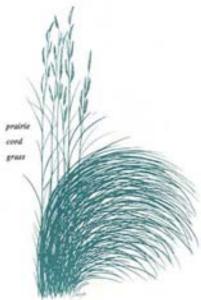


just like a stiff bottlebrush. All

whitish-tan in winter.

grow in shade to full sun and turn

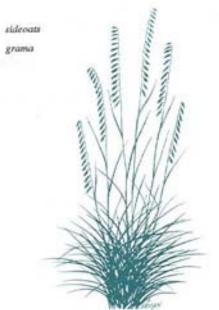




PRAIRIE CORD GRASS
(Spartina pectinata) is the
dominant grass of wet prairies
and sloughs. Its gracefully
arching leaves turn bright yellow
in fall. Unlike other clumpforming native grasses, cord grass
spreads aggressively by rhizomes
and is best used to stabilize pond
edges and stream sides.

RIVER OATS (Chasmanthium latifolium) grows 2-3 feet tall with clusters of attractive, flattened seed heads that are wonderful in dried arrangements. It grows in shade to part sun and has wiry rhizomatous roots that make it ideal for streamside planting as well as in flowerbeds.





WHEN selecting grasses
for landscaping, avoid
using such invasive exotic
grasses as reed canary
grass (Phalaris
arundinacea), Caucasian
or Australian bluestem
(Bothrichloa bladhii),
Johnsongrass (Sorgham
halpense), tall fescue

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(Festuca elatior) or quack

grass (Elymus repens).

SIDEOATS GRAMA (Bouteloua curtipendula) and BLUE
GRAMA (Bouteloua gracilis) are shorter grasses to consider for meadow plantings. Sideoats grama has attractive seed stalks with oat-like seeds that hang to one side of the stem. Blue grama seed stalks have 1 to 3 curved spikes.

BUFFALO GRASS (Buchloe dactyloides) is currently enjoying a revival as a lawn grass.

Researchers are developing new varieties of this short, sodforming grass to fit a wider range of conditions. Buffalo grass is a warm-season grass that requires less maintenance than the traditional cool season lawn grasses.