

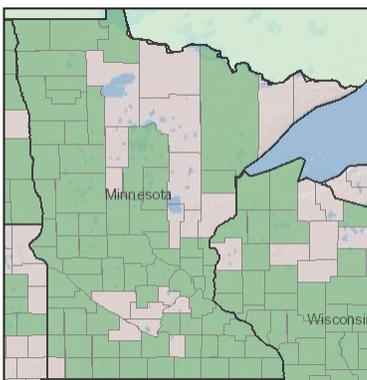
# Little bluestem (*Schizachyrium scoparium*)

## Family: Grass (*Poaceae*)

**DESCRIPTION:** A clump-forming perennial found throughout the U.S. and Canada, little bluestem thrives in short and tallgrass prairies but also grows in savannas, woodland openings and at woods' edges. The species prefers well-drained soil and full to partial sun, but adapts to everything from sand to clay. A warm-season grass, it grows up to 3 feet tall in midsummer. Pairs of flower clusters bloom on spikes starting in July; fluffy white seed heads follow. Frost turns plants from blue-green to copper-red. Five-foot-deep fibrous roots withstand drought, stabilize soils, filter and infiltrate rainwater, store carbon and improve soil health. Folded, smooth-to-hairy leaf blades near the base of the plant grow up to 10 inches long. Purplish, hairless nodes appear along the stems.

**REFERENCES:**

- [Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center](#)
- [USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service](#)
- [Minnesota Wildflowers](#)



Range Map Credit: NRCS Plants Database



**SIMILAR SPECIES:** Big bluestem (*Andropogon gerardii*), grows 7 feet tall, has oval leaf bases, and turns gold-to-pink after frost. Indian grass (*Sorghastrum nutans*) grows 7 feet tall, turns gold, and produces dense seed clusters.

## Planting Recommendations & Uses

Little bluestem spreads by seed and short rhizomes. It can be started from seed, transplanted, or purchased in containers. Seed can be planted in spring or fall with a seed drill or by broadcasting; it requires no pretreatment to break dormancy. Because germination is most successful with good seed-to-soil contact, if seed is broadcast it's helpful to rake it into the soil an eighth-inch to a quarter-inch deep. Depending upon the size of the planting, it can be helpful to pack areas with a garden or agricultural roller. For smaller plantings, clumps can be separated and transplanted. Transplanting and installing containerized plants is often most effective in spring or late fall when plants are less actively

growing. To prevent roots from drying out over winter, it's important to sufficiently water fall plantings. Great companion plants are prairie dropseed grass, sky-blue aster, black-eyed Susan, wild bergamot, rough blazing star, butterfly milkweed and prairie smoke. Little bluestem is grazed, used for nesting material and wildlife cover. Its upright clumps provide habitat for several species of butterfly larvae. It's important nesting cover for bumblebees and ground-nesting birds. It is frequently used in prairie restorations, residential plantings and as an ornamental grass. Historically, it was crushed, dried and used to insulate moccasins.

**Developed by Asiya Hussein**

A recent University of Minnesota Twin Cities graduate, Hussein majored in environmental sciences, policy and management, following the conservation and resource management track. She minored in sustainability studies. An avid writer and lover of the outdoors, she plans to begin graduate studies in marine and environmental affairs at the University of Washington.



**STATEWIDE WETLAND INDICATOR STATUS:** GP, MW, NCNE: FACU