

Sweetgrass (*Anthoxanthum hirtum*)

Family: Grass (Poaceae)

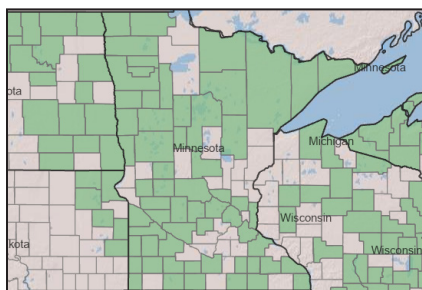
DESCRIPTION: Sweetgrass is best known for its distinctive sweet, vanilla-like scent, which is especially noticeable in summer. Among the first grasses to flower each year, it typically blooms from May through July. It spreads through rhizomes, forming patches. This cool season grass grows in a variety of habitats, particularly along road edges and in low-lying areas with consistently moist, well-draining, loamy soil.

USES: Its dense rhizomes help bind soil, making it useful for erosion control and bank stabilization. To the Ho-Chunk, sweetgrass (maq̄naŋse) is considered a sacred spiritual and physical medicinal herb. It is also used in fiber arts, including black ash basketry, weaving and other forms of art. Gathered around midsummer, sweetgrass may be braided into three-strand braids and dried for future use.

REFERENCES:

[Minnesota Wildflowers](#)
[USDA Plant Guide](#)

Native American Ethnobotany; Daniel E. Moerman; Timber Press, Inc
Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teachings of Plants; Robin Wall Kimmerer; Milkweed Editions



Range Map Credit: USDA Plants Database



Photo Credit: Elizabeth Zingg,
Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa

Planting Recommendations

Sweetgrass is well suited to wetter or sloping areas where its spreading growth can help reduce erosion. Water regularly and harvest once or twice a year, taking care not to disturb the root systems. When handling young plants or plugs, take care to keep their rhizomatic root systems intact. Sweetgrass benefits from ample space, with individual plants generally spaced 1 to 3 feet apart.

When transplanting, dig deeper than the rhizome to protect the root system. After transplanting, cut the leaves to 3 to 4 inches tall to encourage strong root development. Because sweetgrass can be favored by small herbivores, young plants may need protection while establishing. Companion plants include purple coneflower, mountain mint and goldenrod.

STATEWIDE WETLAND INDICATOR

STATUS: GP, MW,
NCNE: FACW

ID: Sweetgrass is a perennial grass that grows in loosely dense clumps 12 to 24 inches tall. Leaf sheaths may be brown-red; the undersides of the grass are shiny, while the top surfaces have small, soft hairs. Seed heads may show purple-tinted spikelet tips.

SIMILAR SPECIES:

Switchgrass (*Panicum virgatum*), quackgrass (*Elymus repens*) and Timothy (*Phleum pratense*) grow nearby. Sweetgrass has glossier leaves and a vanilla-like scent, especially useful for identification in summer. Sweetgrass is much less structured than the other grasses commonly found around it and will appear to lay around the other clumps of grasses much lower to the ground.

Developed by Elizabeth Zingg, (Ho-Chunk, They/Them), invasive species specialist for the Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa

