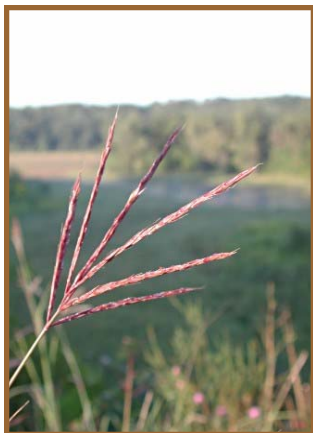


# Big Bluestem

- Native warm-season perennial grass
- Grows in open woods, prairies and dry upland sites
- Thrives in rich sandy soils
- One of the major forage producing grasses
- Provides excellent forage for cattle
- Makes great hay
- Creates escape and nesting cover for birds
- Mature height can be up to 6 ft.



**Seeding Rate:**  
10-12 PLS lbs/Acre  
June—August



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# Big Bluestem

## DESCRIPTION

Sometimes called the “King” of native grasses, Big Bluestem will grow almost anywhere, under any conditions in the tall prairie country. Root systems that can extend up to 12 feet into the ground, give the plant its extraordinary capacity to withstand drought and the extremes of temperatures. Growth begins in early April and some plants may reach a height of eight or nine feet before the growing season ends. The majesty of growth of Big Bluestem occurs after June 1st, which is the same approximate date that the growth of cool-season grasses slows down. By having 30—40 percent of available pasture planted in Big Bluestem or other warm-season grasses, the producer can increase his total grazing operation by the same amount.

## APPLICATION

Big Bluestem occurs on a variety of sites throughout its range but develops best on fertile soil and clay loam soils of lowlands. Presence or absence of soil moisture seems to be the most important factor determining planting success. It develops best on moist sites in the true prairie mixed grass community. Where precipitation is limited, the Big Bluestem will be found growing in ravines and on the lower portion of gentle slopes. Despite the need for moisture, Big Bluestem will tolerate long periods of drought due to the extensive root system that can be ten or twelve feet in depth, thus enabling it to efficiently use whatever moisture is available.

## USES

Uses for Big Bluestem are many. Due to its rapid growth pattern, it is a top choice for erosion control on moderately to well drained soils. It is one of the most palatable warm season grasses, thus making it popular for forage. Wildlife management agencies use big Bluestem as a primary component in plantings for upland birds and mammals, who use it for nesting and escape cover throughout the year. In addition, insects are attracted in large numbers to Big Bluestem, which insures the usage by many species of songbirds.

## SEEDING

**Rates:** 10—12 PLS lbs/Acre. on new seeding.

**Depth:** Sow at no more than 1/2 inch in depth. Emerging seedlings lack the strength to push through too much overlying soil. More seed has been lost to poor planting practices than anything else; this is especially true of seed depth.

## CULTURAL PRACTICES

**Soil Preparation:** For the best conservation practice, no-till the seed into the stubble of a previous crop or the existing stand of another species that has been successfully eradicated. Pay close attention to previous land use practices. If a row crop has been planted for many years in succession a herbicide carryover is possible. If you feel you must plow up the site before planting, prepare your seedbed like you would for any other crop. The seedbeds need to be firm, not fluffy, so the seed will not be planted at an inappropriate depth. Use a cultipacker to firm your seedbed or some other type of roller that will create a smooth planting area that is not too hard.

**pH:** Of all the native grasses, Big Bluestem has one of the highest tolerances of acidity in the soil. It is useful for seeding or spoil areas and other poor sites where it has been known to thrive on areas with a pH as low as 4.5.

**NPK requirement:** We do not recommend the use of fertilizer the first year, at least not nitrogen. Moderate levels of phosphorus and potassium are beneficial, especially for root establishment, which is a primary activity of the plant the first year. Use a soil test to help you decide that. Fertilizer may be applied the second year to enhance vigor and production of forage. It is not necessary to fertilize at all, but stand strength may be compromised without it.

**Weed Control:** We recommend a controlled burn every 1-3 years if possible. If not, then a mowing pattern should be established in order to control woody species invasion and prevent thatch build up. If you mow, mow no lower than 8 inches and no later than August 1.

**Grazing:** Rotational grazing or flash grazing is another good management tool. Care should be taken to prevent the livestock from grazing the warm season grass to a level that would not rebound after grazing. Use 6 inches as your stopping point and a re-growth of 12 inches.

## IDENTIFICATION

**Clum:** Erect, solid, round, 2—6 feet tall, stout, glabrous, glaucous, grooved on one side, branched toward the summit. Can have a blue or purple tinged coloration.

**Blades:** Flat, involute or revolute, 6—24 inches long, .2—.5 inches wide, usually glabrous on the underside and scabrous (rough) above, with rough margins. Usually hairy at the collar.

**Sheath:** Generally shorter than the internodes, glaucous, and purplish.

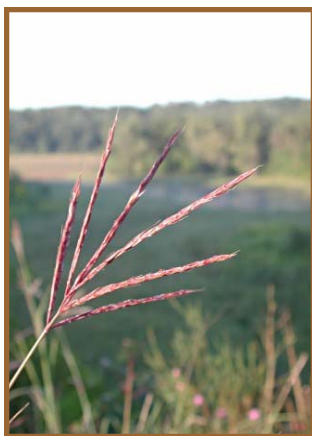
**Ligule:** Membranous, sometimes fringed, about .1 inch long.

**Inflorescence:** The inflorescence is a terminal panicle that is usually composed of two or three spike-like racemes 2-4 inches long, but can have as many as seven. Usually purplish, but can be yellowish. Straight rachis, the joints and pedicles hairy on the sides and at the base, bearing spikelets in pairs.

**Spikelets:** Paired. Sessile spikelets perfect, .3—.4 inch long, lanceolate. Pedicellate spikelet about the same size and sterile or staminate. Lemma of sessile spikelet with .4—.8 inch long awn that is bent and twisted below. The pedicellate spikelets are awnless.

**Bloom:** The normal bloom period for Big Bluestem is late summer.

**Other Names:** Tallest of the Tall, Turkey Claw, Turkey Foot Grass, King of the Prairie



## Area of Adaptation

