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PLANT FACT SHEET

Little Bluestem (*Schizachyrium scoparium*) Fact Sheet



Little Bluestem (*Schizachyrium scoparium*) is a warm season, medium height grass with coarse stems and basal leaves. Beginning growth occurs in late spring and goes through the hot summer months until the first killing frost. Little bluestem has flat bluish basal shoots. The plants are green, but often purplish at the base of stem and after a frost the whole plant has a reddish cast to it. Leaves are smooth, but at the base next to the sheath they are frequently covered with hair. With maturity leaves will tend to fold. Seed head clusters about three inches long, and stems are hairy. Plant height varies from 18 inches on

droughty sites to 3 feet on deep, fertile soils. There are 255,000 seeds per pound.

Little Bluestem is easily mistaken for common Broomsedge. Broomsedge has two or more stalked seed clusters per branch and has a straight awn. Little Bluestem has a single cluster of seeds per branch and has a twisted, bent awn. Seacoast bluestem occurs only in the coastal plain region. It is very similar to little bluestem but can be distinguished by the bent stems at the base, whereas little bluestem stems are erect.

Little Bluestem is readily grazed by livestock, deer, and elk and is a fair forage species. It is also suitable for hay.

The plant provides cover for ground birds and small mammals. Songbirds and upland gamebirds eat the seed as well.

Because of its growth habit and adaptability to a wide range of soil conditions, little bluestem is useful as a component of re-vegetation mixes. It is especially well suited for use on thin upland range sites.

Little bluestem is used in ornamental plantings as well. It has blue-green leaves during the growing season and in the fall, you will find an attractive rusty color with white fluffy seed heads.

In North America Little Bluestem is one of the most widely distributed native grasses. It will grow on a wide variety of soils but is very well adapted to well-drained, medium to dry, infertile soils. The plant has excellent drought and fair shade tolerance, and fair to poor flood tolerance. It grows preferentially on sites with pH 7.0 and slightly higher.

Little bluestem should be seeded as early in the spring as possible. Where no-till is used due to slope, stoniness, or other reasons, sod control should be performed in the fall to permit early spring planting. The seeding rate for establishing a pure stand with broadcast or no-

till methods should be 7 to 12 pounds PLS per acre. When drills are used to plant, de-bearded seed must be utilized unless the drill has a chaffy seed box. When the seed is broadcast, a packer should be utilized to firm the seedbed and incorporate the seed 1/4 to 1/2 inch (3/4 inch on very droughty sites). No nitrogen fertilizer should be applied during the establishment year unless no weed competition is expected. If pH is below 5.5, lime is recommended during site preparation or the fall prior to no-till plantings.

For critical area seeding, the preferred method of planting is drilling, but if this is not possible, an acceptable alternative method is broadcasting the seed (typically in a mix with other warm season grasses) and 'tracking' it in with a bulldozer. The dozer moves up and down slope, off-setting each pass until the entire area is covered with tracks. Seeding should occur as early as possible in the spring on sands and gravels, without mulching. Moderate levels of

N, P, and K are sufficient for establishment, and soil pH should be 5.5 to 6.0. Cultipacker-type planters are not suitable for this species.

Control of competition is necessary for successful stand establishment. High mowing (above the bluestem seedlings) is a common method of weed control. Using proper management practices can rehabilitate poor, established stands. Practices include controlled grazing, application of recommended rates of herbicides and fertilizer, and prescribed spring burning, where permitted.

Do not graze forage planting during the year of establishment. During subsequent growing seasons, harvesting by controlled grazing or haying is possible on good stands. Do not remove more than 50% of the current year's growth from plants. No cropping should occur below 8 inches or within 1 month of anticipated frosts. Grazing of competing cool season grasses after frost in the fall and before the little bluestem is 1 inch tall in the spring is desirable.

Seed Available in the Following Quantities

Packet	Ounce	Pound	50# Bag	Wholesale	Retail	Dropship
\$2.00 + SH	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Call Freddie Lorenz for a quote — Toll free 1 800 826 3655