

**Minnesota Water Garden Society Annual Meeting      October 11, 2020**  
**Best Grasses for Minnesota especially for Water Gardens**  
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**Environmental Benefits of Native Grasses**

- Minimize soil erosion and increase organic matter
- Low nutrient requirement, supplemental nutrients are not needed
- Once established, low water requirement, drought tolerant
- Provide habitat for birds, wildlife, native bees
- Larval food for butterflies, birds and wildlife
- Not a primary food for white tailed deer

<b>Native Grasses and Lepidoptera Use in the Upper Midwest</b>		
<i>Bouteloua curtipendula</i>	side oats grama	Larval food for 6 butterflies and moths
<i>Bouteloua gracilis</i>	blue grama	larval food for 13 native butterflies and moths
<i>Buchloe dactyloides</i>	buffalograss	larval food for no native butterflies; needs further research
<i>Carex species</i>	sedges	especially hairy and tussock sedges, larva food for <b>36 native butterflies</b>
<i>Elymus canadensis</i>	Canada wildrye	<i>Elymus</i> genus is larval host for <b>29 native butterflies</b> ; <i>Elymus canadensis</i> larval food for 3 native moths
<i>Koeleria macrantha</i>	June grass	Larval food for 5 native butterflies and moths
<i>Panicum virgatum</i>	switchgrass	food and winter cover for birds; larval food for 6 native butterflies and moths
<i>Schizachyrium scoparium</i>	little bluestem	larval food for 11 native butterflies and moths
<i>Sorghastrum nutans</i>	Indian grass	larval food for 2 native butterflies and moths
<i>Spartina pectinata</i>	prairie cord grass	larval food for 4 native butterflies and moths
<i>Sporobolus heterolepis</i>	prairie dropseed	larval food for 6 native butterflies and moths

**Drier, Upland Sites:**

- Bouteloua gracilis*      blue grama  
'Blond Ambition' white panicles, taller to 3'
- Bouteloua curtipendula*      sideoats grama
- Schizachyrium scoparium*      little bluestem  
'Little Luke' red and 24 inches; 'Smoke Signal' dark purple  
'MinnBlue A' Blue Heaven™, from U of MN  
'Blue Paradise' 30 inches, NEW
- Sporobolus heterolepis*  
'Tara' or 'Morning Mist' NEW in 2019

**Mesic Sites:**

- Andropogon gerardii*      big bluestem  
'Indian Warrior', 'Lord Snowden', 'Red October' 'Dancing Wind'  
'Black Hawks' NEW upright dark purple
- Deschampsia caespitosa*      turfted hairgrass      SHADE TOLERANT

*Panicum virgatum*, switchgrass

'Dallas Blues': taller, large purple panicles

'Cloud 9', Thundercloud', very tall, large

'Shenandoah': 'Prairie Fire', 'Ruby Ribbons' red and purple

**'Northwind' upright, stiff; 'Cape Breeze' shorter**

### **Grasses, sedges and rushes for wet sites, native unless noted**

sweet flag, *Acorus calamus*, European and *A. americanus*

palm sedge, *Carex muskingumensis*

lake sedge, *Carex lacustris*

river oats, *Chasmanthium latifolium*

American mannagrass, *Glyceria grandis*

common rush, *Juncus effusus*

hard or blue rush, *Juncus inflexus*, Europe

switchgrass, *Panicum virgatum*

prairie cordgrass, *Spartina pectinata*

### **Lakeshores, can tolerate changes in water level and standing water, all natives,**

2 cultivars are human selections of the native species

bluejoint, *Calamagrostis canadensis*

bottlebrush sedge, *Carex comosa*

mace sedge, *Carex grayi*

lake sedge, *Carex lacustris*

palm sedge, *Carex muskingumensis*

variegated palm sedge, *Carex muskingumensis* 'Oehme'

'Little Midge' palm sedge, *Carex muskingumensis* 'Little Midge'

tussock sedge, *Carex stricta*

American mannagrass, *Glyceria grandis*

prairie cordgrass, *Spartina pectinata*

*Hakonechloa macra*                      hakone grass

*H. macra* 'All Gold' 'Aureola'      hakone grass

### **Human Benefits of Grasses**

- ❖ Natural appearance
- ❖ Few insect or disease problems
- ❖ Low nutrient requirements
- ❖ Little maintenance, except spring cutback
- ❖ More than one season of interest
- ❖ Fast growth, most are mature size by three years
- ❖ Varied texture, from fine fescues to coarse giant miscanthus
- ❖ An array of foliage colors from many shades of green to blue, yellow, bronze and red, as well as several variegated forms
- ❖ Movement with the wind provides visual and audio interest, susurrations that is pleasing and unique

**Use with Caution: 3 different miscanthus:**

*Miscanthus sinensis*: bunch grass, 50 cultivars:

‘Grazielle’; ‘Zebrinus’, ‘Variegatus’, ‘Klein Fontaene’ ‘Purpurescens’ ‘Sliberfeder’

*Miscanthus sacchariflorus*: invasive rhizomes, early white flowers, escaped in Minnesota

*Miscanthus x giganteus*: 10-14’ tall, 1-2” wide foliage, flowers late, no seeds

***Miscanthus* should only be planted in managed landscapes where it can be watched for self-seeding. For more information, see:**

<http://www.horticulture.umn.edu/miscanthus/>

Management: Cutback tops in late winter, burn large areas with timing to manage native animals and insects.

**RESOURCES:**

Ornamental Grasses for Cold Climates, updated 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, 2012; \$12.95+ available from:

Minnesota Landscape Arboretum Gift Shop and online:

<http://www.mnarbonline.com/Gift-Store-C27.aspx>

**Benefits of Native Grasses website: [grasses.cfans.umn.edu](http://grasses.cfans.umn.edu)  
several handouts and posters**

Grass Blog: [grasstalk.wordpress.com](http://grasstalk.wordpress.com); Twitter: marygrasses email: [meyer023@umn.edu](mailto:meyer023@umn.edu)

**FREE ebook:**

**Gardening with Native Grasses in Cold Climates: <https://z.umn.edu/nativegrasses>**

**[Top 10 Grasses 2019 Green Expo MHM presentation \(native in bold\)](#)**

- ***Andropogon gerardii* ‘Blackhawks’** Illinois native selection PP
- ***Carex pensylvanica*** Pennsylvania sedge Midwest and Eastern US native
- ***Carex muskingumensis*** palm sedge Midwest and Eastern US native
- *Hakonechloa macra* hakone grass Japanese origin
- *Molinia caerulea* subspecies *arundinacea* ‘Skyracer’ European origin
- ***Panicum virgatum* ‘Cape Breeze’** Martha’s Vineyard, MA native selection PP
- ***Panicum virgatum* ‘Northwind’** Wisconsin native selection
- ***Schizachyrium scoparium* ‘Blue Heaven’** Minnesota native selection, PP
- ***Schizachyrium scoparium* ‘Blue Paradise’** Walter’s Gardens, MI breeding PP
- ***Sporobolus heterolepis* ‘Morning Mist’** Wisconsin native selection PP

Table from ebook by Narem and Meyer:

COMPLETE LIFE CYCLE TABLE				
GRASS	+	FLOWER	=	LEPIDOPTERA
big bluestem		bird's-foot violet		cobweb skipper
little bluestem		Carolina larkspur		cobweb skipper
big bluestem		wild hyacinth		cobweb skipper, dusted skipper
little bluestem		wild strawberry		cobweb skipper, dusted skipper
switchgrass		viburnum spp.		pepper and salt skipper
sideoats grama		penstemon spp.		hilltop little skipper
switchgrass		dogbane		tawny-edged skipper
switchgrass		purple coneflower		tawny-edged skipper
big bluestem		common milkweed		Delaware skipper, Ottoe skipper
big bluestem		pickernelweed		Delaware skipper
switchgrass		swamp milkweed		Delaware skipper
big bluestem		ox-eye		Dakota skipper, arogos skipper
prairie dropseed		black-eyed Susans		Dakota skipper, Poweshiek skipperling
little bluestem		purple coneflower		Dakota skipper, arogos skipper, Poweshiek skipperling, Ottoe skipper
prairie dropseed		leadplant		Ottoe skipper
lake sedge		Joe Pye weed		northern/marsh eyed brown