

Bottlebrush Grass *Elymus hystrix*
(syn. *Hystrix patula*)

Native habitat: Found in woods and open clearings.

Garden Conditions: Dappled light, moderate to full shade. Grows in dry to moist sandy loam soils with good drainage.

Form and Flower: Flower clusters are arranged perpendicular to the stem and resemble an actual bottlebrush. It grows naturally interspersed among other woodland plants. Flowers June to August. Grows 60 – 120 cm (2 – 4 ft).

Range: Nova Scotia and Quebec to North Dakota, south to Virginia and Oklahoma.

Little Bluestem *Schizachyrium scoparium*

Native habitat: Fields, prairies and open woods.

Garden Conditions: Full sun and dry soil. Will not tolerate competition. An important species of tallgrass and mixed grass prairies.

Form and Flower: The flowers line the branches and appear in late summer. Grows 20 – 80 cm (8 in – 2.5 ft) in height. In the fall the leaves turn red at the tips.

Range: New Brunswick to Alberta, south to Florida and Mexico.

Medium to Large-Sized Grasses

Canada Wild Rye *Elymus canadensis*

Native habitat: Moist to dry fields and meadows, dunes, bluffs and streambanks.

Garden Conditions: Wide range of conditions in full to partial sun, moist to dry soil, clay, loam or sand. Drought-tolerant. Good for covering a bare area while other prairie species become established.

Form and Flower: Blooms in late summer. The graceful arching seed heads turn sandy as they ripen and are very distinctive and decorative. Grows 1 – 1.5 m (3 – 5 ft).

Range: New Brunswick to Alaska, south to North Carolina, Texas and California.



ILLUSTRATION BY ELLEN MELVILLE

Big Bluestem *Andropogon gerardii*

Native habitat: Prairies, savannah and meadows.

Garden Conditions: Full sun to light shade. Dry to mesic soil (sand, loam or clay). Drought-tolerant. Attracts birds and butterflies. A major component of tallgrass prairies.

Form and Flower: Flowers are reddish-blue short spikes that resemble a turkey's foot, August to October. The seed heads ripen to a golden brown. Attractive bronze foliage in the fall. It grows in clumps to 75 – 150 cm (2.5 – 5 ft) in height.

Range: Quebec to Saskatchewan, south to Florida and Arizona.

Switchgrass *Panicum virgatum*

Native habitat: Prairie, open woods, marsh edge, coastal dunes, shores and brackish marshes.

Garden Conditions: Full sun. Dry to moist soils, sand and loam.

Form and Flower: Flowers are borne singly at the ends of branches in a very open form. Delicate-looking. Flowers are purple from August to October and the seed heads are tan to brown in colour. Grows in a clump 40 cm – 2 m (16 in – 6 ft) in height.

Range: Nova Scotia to Manitoba and Montana, south to Arizona and Mexico.

Indian Grass *Sorghastrum nutans*

Native habitat: Tallgrass prairie (moist or dry) and open woods.

Garden Conditions: Full sun to partial shade. Dry to mesic soil (sand, loam or clay), well-drained. A signature plant of tallgrass prairie ecosystems. Birds feed on the seeds.

Form and Flower: Flowers are small and bright yellow and appear in the late summer. The seed heads are golden brown, forming upright plumes in the fall. Grows 1 – 2.5 m (3 – 8 ft).

Range: Throughout North America.

Other Good Grasses

Canada Bluejoint *Calamagrostis canadensis* is a rapidly spreading, sod-forming grass that is useful for erosion control on wet sites. Grows 50 – 150 cm (20 in – 5 ft) in height. **Range:** Greenland to Alaska, south to North Carolina, Missouri and Arizona.

Poverty Oat Grass *Danthonia spicata* grows 10 – 60 cm (4 in – 2 ft) in infertile soils.

Range: Newfoundland to Florida, west to BC and south to Mexico

References

Grasses: An Identification Guide, by Lauren Brown, 1979, Houghton Mifflin Company, New York.

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100 Easy-to-grow Native Plants for Canadian Gardens, by Lorraine Johnson, 1999, Random House of Canada, Toronto.

Guide to Flowering Plant Families, by Wendy Zomlefer, 1994, The University of North Carolina Press, North Carolina.

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