



United States Department of Agriculture
Natural Resources Conservation Service
Plant Materials Program

Southlow Michigan Germplasm Big Bluestem

Andropogon gerardii Vitman

A Conservation Plant Release by USDA NRCS NAME Plant Materials Center, East Lansing, MI



Southlow Michigan Germplasm big bluestem

The USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service, the Michigan Association of Conservation Districts, and the Michigan Department of Natural Resources released Southlow Michigan Germplasm big bluestem in September 2001 for the Great Lakes region.

Description

Southlow Michigan Germplasm big bluestem is a composite of several big bluestem collections and has features consistent with the species. It is a perennial, warm season bunch grass with short, scaly rhizomes. Stems are erect, pithy, and can reach a height of eight feet. It is very leafy at the base, lessening considerably up the stem. Leaf blades have long, silky hairs that are widely dispersed on the upper surface. Plants bear two to six racemes at the top of the culms, and usually some smaller inflorescences from the leaf axils.

Source

Seed was collected from native stands as designated by the Michigan Department of Natural Resources, Wildlife Division, of big bluestem within the southern half of Michigan's Lower Peninsula.

Conservation Uses

The anticipated uses of Southlow Michigan Germplasm big bluestem include providing food/cover for wildlife, increasing species diversity, controlling erosion and restoring native plant environments. Big bluestem attracts insects and provides seed that is used as a food source by

songbirds, game birds and small mammals. Many wildlife species also utilize big bluestem for nesting and winter cover. As this is a native plant species and composite, it will be useful as a component in the restoration and diversification of native habitats, particularly Southern Michigan, its source of origin. Big bluestem may also be useful in combination with other warm and cool season grasses for erosion control because of its massive root system.



Southlow Michigan Germplasm big bluestem in bloom

Area of Adaptation and Use

This species is found in dry open areas throughout much of the United States and is a major component of tall and mixed grass prairies.

Southlow Michigan Germplasm big bluestems' primary utilization area is expected to be in the southern Great Lakes area.

Establishment and Management for Conservation Plantings

Southlow Michigan Germplasm big bluestem can be established by seed. Big bluestem seeds often have 'fluffy' appendages that make the seed difficult to plant using a standard grain drill. Using a grain drill with a fluffy seed box is recommended for mechanical planting. Seed can be broadcast and cultipacked as well. Seeding rate for big bluestem is 2-5 lb. PLS/acre. Increase seeding rate by 10% if broadcast seeding methods are used. Care should be taken to limit seeding depth to no more than 1/4" in most soils, and ensure adequate seed to soil contact. Weed control during establishment is critical. Mowing and use of registered herbicides will aid in weed control. Always read and follow herbicide label directions.



A field of Southlow Michigan Germplasm big bluestem

Ecological Considerations

No insect or disease problems have been observed on Southlow Michigan Germplasm big bluestem.

Seed and Plant Production

Southlow Michigan Germplasm big bluestem produces seed annually. Seed can be harvested mechanically with a combine harvester or a brush “stripper”. Timing is critical as mature seed can fall off of the plant. Seed cleaning can be done using a fanning mill. Using a debearder to remove the fluffy appendages will aid in seed cleaning and handling.



A stand of Southlow Michigan Germplasm big bluestem

Availability

Seed/plant stock of Southlow Michigan Germplasm big bluestem will be maintained cooperatively by the USDA-NRCS Rose Lake Plant Materials Center and the Michigan Department of Natural Resources and made available to qualified parties for increase purposes.

For more information, contact:
Rose Lake Plant Materials Center
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For additional information about this and other plants, please contact your local USDA Service Center, NRCS field office, or Conservation District <<http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/>>, and visit the PLANTS Web site <<http://plants.usda.gov/>> or the Plant Materials Program Web site <<http://www.plant-materials.nrcs.usda.gov/>>

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