

SLENDER LITTLE BLUESTEM

Schizachyrium tenerum Nees
Plant Symbol = SCTE5

Contributed By: USDA NRCS National Plant Data Center



From Hitchcock (1950)
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Alternate Names

slender bluestem, *Andropogon tener*

Uses

Although slender little bluestem is not one of the preferred forage grasses in the southern U.S., cattle graze it when it is young and tender.

Status

Please consult the PLANTS Web site and your State Department of Natural Resources for this plant's current status, such as, state noxious status, and wetland indicator values.

Description

Grass Family (Poaceae). Slender little bluestem is a native, warm-season, perennial bunch grass. The height is between 1 and 3 feet, often found reclining or lying flat on ground. The leaf blade is narrow; 2 to 8 inches long; 1/16 inch wide or less; wiry. The leaf sheath is rounded; smooth; mostly basal. The ligule is hairy. The stem is a bend at each node giving a zigzag appearance; often branching at nodes. The seedhead is single straight spike-like raceme on each seed stalk. The seeds shatter soon after maturity, leaving a tiny hollow tip on each stalk.

Distribution: For current distribution, please consult the Plant Profile page for this species on the PLANTS Web site.

Management

Grazing practices should favor the broader leaved, more palatable grasses rather than slender bluestem. Heavy grazing for a short period after spring growth starts followed by a 6-month grazing deferment and light use make it possible for later maturing grasses, such as pinehill bluestem (*Schizachyrium scoparium* var. *divergens*) to shade out slender bluestem and dominate the site. Slender bluestem increases if burned annually and grazed continuously. New growth following a burn is the most palatable. As seed stalks form, palatability declines rapidly. It is an indicator of excessive grazing.

Establishment

Growth starts in the early spring and continues into the summer. The seedheads generally form by mid-July. In the fall and winter, foliage tangles, mats together, and turns a faded straw color. This species grows in colonies. Slender bluestem is not as shade tolerant as many associated grasses. It is best adapted to open or sparsely wooded poorly drained soils and is also found on sandy well-drained soils.

Cultivars, Improved and Selected Materials (and area of origin)

Please contact your local NRCS Field Office.

Reference

Leithead, H.L., L.L. Yarlett, & T.N. Shiflett. 1976. 100 native forage grasses in 11 southern states. USDA SCS *Agriculture Handbook No. 389*, Washington, DC.

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