

Native Grasses of the Ivy Creek Natural Area

Two hundred years ago, native grasslands occupied major portions of the North American continent. Today, less than one percent of these extensive grasslands remain in North America.

As the native grasslands diminished so have species that depended on them for existence.

However, there is a growing movement to restore native grasslands by converting fescue pastures back to the native grasses that existed before them.

Over the past 2 years, under the leadership of Ivy Creek foundation president John Scrivani, the Foundation has restored its two hayfields to native grass habitat.

The late summer fields of Ivy Creek reveal a wealth of color and diversity

Big Bluestem

Andropogon gerardii



extraordinary capacity to withstand drought and extreme temperature.

Sometimes called the King of native grasses, Big Bluestem can grow up to eight-feet-tall with long thin flowers radiating from the top of the stem, thus its common name of "turkey foot." It displays an array of color throughout the summer and fall, from steel gray-blue in the summer to brown, red and purple in the fall. Root systems extending 12 feet down give the plant an

Little Bluestem

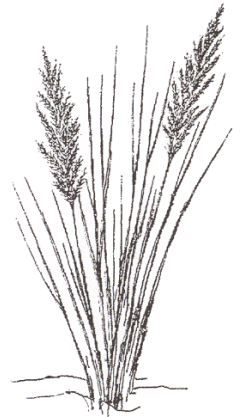
Schizachyrium scoparium.

Little Bluestem is an unfortunate name for this striking grass because it is neither little nor particularly blue - except when the shoots come up in early summer. By the time it flowers, it has turned a rich mixture of tan and brown with wine-red branches. Probably the most abundant native grass, Little Bluestem is an excellent forage plant, although it is better known in the east as an old-field invader.

Indian Grass

Sorghastrum nutans

Competing with Big Bluestem for height, Indian grass is distinctive for the small twisted bristles on its slightly fuzzy, late summer flowers. The inflorescence is tall and narrow and turns a shining golden brown. The fruit, six to 10 inches long, appears as copper-colored plumes, making this a very attractive plant.



Broomsedge

Andropogon virginicus



A common grass at Ivy Creek, Broomsedge is very coarse and turns a beautiful bronze-orange in the winter. It is leafier than other grasses and the flower stalk, surrounded by silvery white hairs, is tucked inside the leaves. Although the plant is not good livestock forage, it has long been the backbone of Virginia quail habitat.

What we are replacing....

Tall fescue was introduced from Europe in the late 1800s. It is widely planted for pasture, hay, lawn and for erosion control under the name of Kentucky 31.



In natural areas tall fescue crowds out native species and lowers biodiversity by forming dense clumps with a thick mat of roots. This quality also makes fescue fields difficult to navigate for our native wildlife.