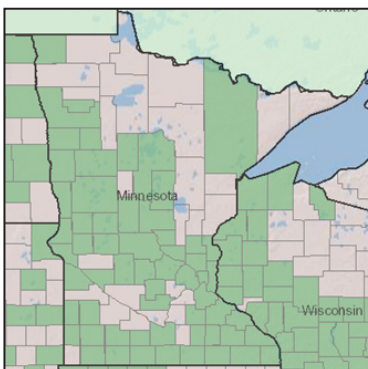


Indian grass (*Sorghastrum nutans*)

Family: Grass
(Poaceae)

DESCRIPTION: This warm-season, clump-forming native perennial grows 3 to 7 feet tall in open woods, prairies and savannas. Alternate leaves are concentrated in the lower half of the plant. A narrow panicle at the tip of the stem grows 6 to 20 inches long. The soft-textured seeds ripen in late summer.

USES: In large gardens, it works well behind shorter prairie species. It's popular in prairie restorations. It can spread aggressively, so in shortgrass prairies it's planted sparingly. It shelters and feeds rodents, birds and livestock. The erect form is excellent nesting habitat for songbirds and gamebirds, which eat insects that feed on it. It's a larval host for the pepper and salt skipper, and the Ottoe skipper. Bison and cattle graze on the grass. Indian grass adds height and texture to dried floral arrangements. Native Americans wove it into baskets and mats.



Range Map Credit: NRCS Plants Database



Planting Recommendations

Indian grass will grow in dry to moist soil, but prefers plenty of sun. Because it spreads by rhizomes and seed, it requires lots of space. In the prairie, it's found with big bluestem. In plantings, consider complementary late-season plants such as little bluestem, asters and Joe Pye weed to add height, color and interest. Indian grass is

available in containers, and can be grown from seed. Pre-treatment is unnecessary; seeds will germinate after sowing when the weather and site conditions are right. In a residential setting, Indian grass works best in a backyard along waterways or woodland edges where it can expand, hide a fence or add height to a planting.

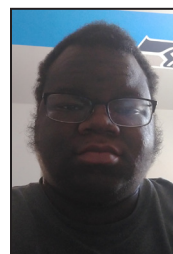
STATEWIDE WETLAND INDICATOR STATUS: FACU

ID: The stems of this 5-foot-tall upright grass turn golden-brown in fall. Pollen is found on yellow stamens that become showy in midsummer to late fall. Leaves grow up to 2 feet long and rarely more than a half-inch wide. The white midvein is most visible closer to the base. Pointed, alternate and usually smooth on both sides, the leaf blades grow 2 to 24 inches long. The V-shaped ligule notch is best seen in early growing stages.

SIMILAR SPECIES: Canada bluejoint grass (*Calamagrostis canadensis*), favors moist soils and grows 3 feet tall. Big bluestem (*Andropogon gerardii*) likes similar habitats and reaches a similar height. It has red-to-maroon stems, and seed heads with many spikes and tightly grouped seeds that look like a turkey's foot.

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Contributed Photo

REFERENCES:

[Illinois Wildflowers](#)
[Friends of the Wild Flower Garden](#)
[Minnesota Wildflowers](#)