



Big Bluestem

BIG BLUESTEM Sometimes called the "King" of native grasses, Big Bluestem will grow almost anywhere, under any conditions in the tall prairie country. Root systems that can extend up to 12 feet into the ground, give the plant its extraordinary capacity to withstand drought and the extremes of temperatures. Growth begins in early April and some plants may reach a height of eight or nine feet before the growing season ends. The majesty of growth of Big Bluestem occurs after June 1st, which is the same approximate date that the growth of cool-season grasses slows down. By having 30 to 40 percent of available pasture planted in Big Bluestem or the other warm-season grasses, the producer can increase his total grazing operation by the same amount.

FACTS ABOUT BIG BLUESTEM:

- **Big bluestem provides excellent yield, dependable forage, and very low maintenance.**
- **It can be used for all types of foraging livestock.**
- **Big Bluestem provides choice wildlife cover and habitat.**
- **Soil fertility is increased by Big Bluestem, as moisture is retained and root systems hold developing mulch, thus increasing organic matter.**



VARIETIES:

Bonilla is adapted for North Dakota, South Dakota, western Minnesota. Although winter-hardy, **Bonilla** produces a lesser amount of forage than southern varieties.

Champ is a variety developed by the Nebraska Agriculture Experiment Station. It is a moderately late maturing variety, which has shown superior seed quality compared to those of native Big Bluestem. **Champ** has performed well on sandy and fine-textured soils.

Kaw is a variety that has shown superior leafiness and vigor. It was developed from Kansas plants; therefore it thrives when raised under similar conditions. It is considered to be more disease resistant than native Big Bluestem.

Native is a good quality, high yielding, highly palatable long-lived grass. Few prairie grasses can equal the quality or quantity of forage produced by native Big Bluestem. Lacking only some of the special qualities that have been developed into the other varieties, Native Big Bluestem is truly a champion among grasses. Native Big Bluestem provides excellent wildlife habitat, and due to its sod-forming ability, is prized for erosion control.

Pawnee was developed in Nebraska. Plants grow waist high or more, with deep green leaves and tall seed stalks. This variety is very hardy, with maximum growth in mid-summer and maturity reached in late summer.

Rountree is a variety developed for areas further north and into the east, especially around the Lower Great Lakes regions. Of necessity, it has a shorter growing season, reaching maturity earlier than some other varieties.

ESTABLISHMENT / MANAGEMENT Proper ground preparation is one of the most important considerations when native grasses are being established. The seed bed should be firm, but not solid. Cultivation to kill the roots of cool-season grasses is essential. Planting can be done by either drilling or broadcasting, and the seed should be covered with no more than one fourth inch of soil. Avoid planting the seed too deep. Test the soil for deficiencies, and apply needed phosphorus, potassium, or lime prior to seeding. No additional fertilization is required after the stand has been established. Once your stand is well established, regulate the grazing patterns to avoid over-grazing. Much consideration should be given to controlled grazing toward the end of the growing season; grass grazed too closely weakens the root structure which provides a storage system for food reserves. Without these reserves of food, the plant will die or be extremely stressed, thereby delaying or diminishing the spring "green up".

