

big bluestem *Andropogon gerardii*

Kingdom: Plantae

Division/Phylum: Magnoliophyta

Class: Liliopsida

Order: Cyperales

Family: Poaceae

ILLINOIS STATUS common, native

FEATURES

Big bluestem is the state grass of Illinois. This perennial herb is also known as turkey-foot grass because its three-part flowering structure resembles a turkey's foot. Its upright, smooth stems may grow to eight feet tall. The leaves are long, narrow and up to one-half inch wide. Flowers are arranged in paired spikelets at the stem tip, one sessile and one on a stalk. Flowers do not have sepals or petals. The fruit produced is a grain. The flower stalks have blue, salmon and orange stems.

BEHAVIORS

Big bluestem may be found statewide in Illinois, growing in moist, prairie soils. It starts to grow in late April and blooms from July through September. This plant was the main component of the original Illinois prairie vegetation. It was an important food source for grazing animals on the prairies. The plant's stems turn yellow or bronze in the fall.

HABITATS

Aquatic Habitats

wet prairies and fens

Woodland Habitats

none

Prairie and Edge Habitats

black soil prairie; dolomite prairie; gravel prairie; hill prairie; sand prairie; shrub prairie

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