



Schizachyrium scoparium named Perennial Plant of the Year®

Hopefully the last of the winter weather is behind us and we can get serious about what will be planted in the garden this year. Gardeners looking for a popular selection should consider the *Schizachyrium scoparium*, commonly known as little bluestem or beard grass, and its cultivars. This decorative grass plant was chosen by the Perennial Plant Association as the 2022 Perennial Plant of the Year®.

Schizachyrium scoparium is a species of North American prairie grass native to most of the contiguous United States, as well as a small area near the Canada/U.S. border and just south of the Mexico/U.S. border. It grows well in USDA zones 3 to 10 and is one of the dominant grasses of the vast tallgrass prairie.

This plant variety is great in the garden summer through fall and features slender leaves and stems in a variety of colors ranging from gray-green, blue, pink and copper to mahogany, red and orange tones.

The Blues and the Standing Ovation cultivars grow well in the southern region of the country. The Blues is a strong, vigorous grower with fantastic color. The vivid colors are evident in the right growing conditions but can flop if it doesn't get full sun or is placed in fertile soils or irrigated sites. Fine, fluffy white-gray flowers provide a dramatic result in the summer. However, in the fall gardeners will get a whole new color palette, including jewel tones of deep purple and red with hints of raspberry. It also provides seed for birds and is beneficial to many butterfly species.

Standing Ovation is a good choice to add into the mix because it's a good grower and produces a lot of great color. It does fine in fertile soil and irrigated sites, which can be a big plus for the Oklahoma gardener. The seed heads remain upright through the winter and provide winter interest and is a food source for birds.

Little bluestem typically grows to become an upright mound of soft bluish-green or grayish-green blades in May and June and grows to a height of about 2 feet. When installing this grass in the landscape, choose a place that is in full sun and has well-drained soils. The spikey blue-green leaves transition to a wonderful display of shades of red to deep purple in the fall.

As with many other perennials, it can be dug up and divided in the spring for propagation or to reduce the size of an old, big plant.

Gardeners will be glad to know the *Schizachyrium scoparium* is adaptable to a range of soils but isn't fond of weeds. Research shows this plant does well with little water, which can be a bonus at times in Oklahoma.

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