

Schizachyrium scoparium (Little Bluestem)

Ornamental grasses bring a garden drama and texture. Little bluestem -- the Perennial Plant Association's 2022 Perennial Plant of the Year® -- is just such a perennial warm-season native bunchgrass.

The narrow, erect clumps may grow to 2- to 4-ft. tall and wide. The leaves and stems frequently have a bluish cast in summer, while the fall color is a very warm copper that does not fade throughout winter. Purplish bronze seed heads and yellow-orange leaves make for great fall interest.

It performs best in average, dry to medium-moist, well-drained soil in full sun, but it tolerates a wide range of soil conditions including low fertility (which it prefers). Once established, it has excellent drought resistance. It is well-adapted to southern climates as it tolerates high heat, humidity, and salt. Cut it back to



Orange-yellow fall color. This photo was taken in December. Tom Potterfield [CC BY-NC-SA 2.0](#)

the ground in late winter or early spring to promote new, attractive growth, and keep mulch away from the crown.

Little bluestem provides year-round cover for wildlife as well as serving as the larval host plant to various skipper larvae and Common Wood-Nymph (*Cercyonis pegala*). Adult Common Wood-Nymph butterflies feed on rotting fruit and flower nectar. Songbirds and small mammals eat the seeds.

The feathery, fine blue-green leaves are attractive in a mass planting in a rain, cottage, coastal, or low-water-use garden. They adapt well to container plantings or can be used in borders or meadows. Wind creates graceful ripples, and the plant contrasts nicely with hard structures like modern architecture.

It is resistant to black walnut, deer, diseases, drought, dry soil, heat, humidity, insect pests, and pollution.



'Blue Heaven' Form Jim Robbins [CC BY-NC-ND 4.0](#)

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For more information on gardening in Brunswick County, please call the Brunswick County Cooperative Extension Office, 910.253.2610.

SOURCES:

[Schizachyrium scoparium \(Little Bluestem, Prairie Beardgrass, Prairie Beard Grass\) | North Carolina Extension Gardener Plant Toolbox \(ncsu.edu\)](#)

[Ornamental grass lovers- your time is at hand! | Home & Garden Information Center \(clemson.edu\)](#)
<https://extension.umd.edu/resource/little-bluestem/>