

Sorghastrum nutans

Indian Grass

Tried and True
Native Plant Selections
for the Mid-Atlantic



Master Gardeners of Northern Virginia
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This native* of much of North America was once one of the dominant grass species of the tallgrass prairie. It is a good choice for erosion control on slopes and combines well with robust wildflowers such as butterfly-weed, purple and orange coneflowers, and other native grasses.

Grass / Sedge	Summer Foliage, Spikelets, Fall Panicles
Height: 3–5 feet	
Spread: 2–3 feet	
Bloom Color: Light brown	
Characteristics	
Clumping perennial grass with upright form	
Alternate , sheathing, 2'-long, blue-green leaves	
Metallic-sheened, golden panicles of terminal fertile, awned & infertile, hairy- pedicellate spikelets with yellow stamens rise above foliage to 5–6' in Sept.	
Foliage turns yellow-orange in fall	
Feathery panicles turn bronze & persist in winter	
Attributes	
Tolerates clay , rocky, poor, dry, occasionally wet soils; drought; erosion; air pollution; and Black Walnut; no serious pests or diseases; deer -resistant	
Tends to flop in moist, rich soil or excess shade	
Winter interest	
Provides nesting habitat for birds, small mammals, and native bees; foliage feeds grasshoppers and mammalian herbivores; larval host for ~7 lepidopterans , including Delaware & other skippers	
Growing and Maintenance Tips	Excellent Replacement for
Soil Requirements : Well-drained	<i>Cortaderia selloana</i> - Pampas Grass
Light Requirements : Sun	<i>Miscanthus sinensis</i> - Chinese Silver Grass
Water Requirements : Dry, Moist	<i>Cenchrus purpurascens</i> - Fountain Grass
Cut back to ground in early spring before new growth appears	<i>Phyllostachys</i> , <i>Pseudosasa</i> , <i>Bambusa</i> spp. - Bamboo
Use as a vertical accent in borders, mass in meadows, or plant to control erosion on slopes	*It is native to DC, common in DE, and present primarily in the Piedmont and Coastal Plain of MD and throughout PA. In VA, it is common throughout, except in the outer Coastal Plain, where it is infrequent to rare.
Hardiness : USDA Zones 2–9	

developed by Master Gardeners of Northern Virginia, serving Arlington and Alexandria

Images by Elaine Mills, National Garden, U.S. Botanic Garden and (top right) Meadowlark Botanical Gardens



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