

CHALKY BLUESTEM

DESCRIPTION

Chalky bluestem (*Andropogon capillipes*, synonym: *Andropogon virginicus* var. *glaucus*) is a perennial warm-season bunch grass that is native to Louisiana, growing from February to October. It can grow in a variety of soils, from dry to mesic, but

is mostly found in wet, acidic habitats, including pine savannas, wetlands and slopes. Chalky bluestem grows to 3 to 6 feet in height and produces fibrous roots. Its foliage is silvery blue to green in color with a white (chalky) coating that easily rubs off.



IDENTIFICATION

Chalky bluestem is a glaucous, medium to large, bearded grass that can grow up to 6 feet in height when flowering. The leaves of this grass are simple basal with an alternate arrangement and are two-ranked. Bluestem leaves are keeled at the base and tightly folded. The leaves extend upward 20 to 25 inches long and ½ inch wide and are flat at the tip.

The spathe is purple to brown in color. The racemes are shorter than the spathe, about an inch in length. The racemes emerge in late summer to early fall, usually two per peduncle, and are composed of a flower stalk with yellow flowers attached alternately on the stalk. Seeds develop from late summer through the fall (September to October) and are purple in color.

ECOLOGICAL IMPORTANCE

Bluestem grass provides wildlife cover, and seeds provide nourishment for small animals and birds. Chalky bluestem is a butterfly host plant for Zabulon skipper (*Poanes zabulon*).

GROWING CONDITIONS



SOIL TYPE:

Grows best in acidic, well-drained sandy soils in pine forests and savannas.



SOIL PH:

Prefers soil with a low pH (4.9 to 7.0). Always follow soil test recommendations to achieve desired soil pH.



LIGHT:

Prefers full sun to partial shade areas.



GROWTH RATE:

Establishes quickly from seed.



TIP: Before amending the soil, consider testing your soil at the [LSU AgCenter Soil Testing and Plant Analysis Laboratory](#) or contact your local extension office for more information.

MAINTENANCE REQUIREMENTS

Cut back dead leaves when needed, or cut back to the ground in the spring to allow new growth to emerge.

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MAINTENANCE REQUIREMENTS (CONT.)



FERTILIZATION:

Follow soil test recommendations for proper fertility.



IRRIGATION:

Naturally occurring rainfall may provide sufficient water for maintaining a lawn in normal years, but irrigation may need to be applied to prevent plant water stress during drought periods.

ESTABLISHMENT METHODS

Establishment of chalky bluestem can be achieved through division or seeding.

Chalky bluestem seeds can be harvested from October to November, and these grasses can be established quickly from seed. Native grass seed should be sown, or plants transplanted in the fall.

Select and purchase your desired seed and follow the manufacturer's labeled directions for the seeding rate per area.

REFERENCES

https://www.wildflower.org/plants/result.php?id_plant=ANCA4

<https://arboretum.ucf.edu/virtual/chalky-bluestem/>

<http://www.rnr.lsu.edu/plantid/species/bluestem/bluestem.htm>

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https://www.fnps.org/assets/pdf/palmetto/osorio_rufino_ornamental_bunchgrasses_vol_16_no_1_spring_1996.pdf

<https://www.flawildflowers.org/wp-content/resources/pdfs/book/NativePlantsFloridaGardens-Preview.pdf>

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