



## Henderson County Master Gardeners Weekly News Article      October 29, 2018

### Red and White on a Bluestem

By Lydia Holley

Have you been looking for a grass to add interest and beauty to your garden? If you are wanting a grass that is both colorful and native, little bluestem (*Schizachyrium scoparium*) is a wonderful grass to include in an ornamental garden. Its leaves have a decided bluish cast to them in spring and summer. But when autumn arrives, little bluestem turns a patriotic red. At the same time, It sends up inflorescences of seed heads with fluffy white tufts.

Red, white and blue. Appropriately, little bluestem is an American native. Its native range includes all 48 contiguous states except Oregon and Nevada. It is thought that little bluestem was once a major grass of the Post Oak Savannah region. West of the Pineywoods and east of the Backland Prairie, much of Henderson County is a part of the Post Oak Savannah.

Travel back in time before herds of cattle and Bermuda grass dominated the landscape. Little bluestem and other grasses swayed in the breeze as the buffalo grazed. An occasional black bear, red wolf or mountain lion sauntered through. Bobwhite quail hid in the grass, where it made its nest. Wild turkey and mourning doves were abundant.

Colorful wildflowers dotted the landscape along with the occasional tall tree. But not all was serene - fire would sweep through on a regular basis. Either caused naturally or intentionally set by Native Americans, fires preserved the grassy prairies by removing shrubs and trees that would have naturally evolved into forests.

Now known as an ornamental clumping grass, little bluestem is the perfect size for a suburban lot or in a large meadow-style planting. It grows well in full sun or part shade. Because of its extensive root system, little bluestem is tolerant of drought and poor soils.

Beautiful grown en masse, or as an accent plant, little bluestem is the larval host plant to nine types of butterflies. It reportedly reseeds readily, so if you plant it in your garden, you may be lucky enough to acquire plants to share with friends and neighbors.

For more information, call 903-675-6130, email [hendersonCMGA@gmail.com](mailto:hendersonCMGA@gmail.com), or visit [txmg.org/hendersonmg](http://txmg.org/hendersonmg).

