Native Warm Season Grasses

**SWITCHGRASS**  
*(Panicum virgatum)*  
Sod forming, grows 3 to 6 feet tall  

*IDENTIFICATION TIPS:*  
*Sheath:* Round, open, white to purplish tinged below.  
*Blade:* Rolled in the bud shoot, flat up to 1/2-inch wide.  
*Ligule:* Fringe of hairs with a dense mat of hairs extending onto the upper leaf surface.  
*Inflorescence:* Open panicle.

**LITTLE BLUESTEM**  
*(Schizachyrium scoparium)*  
Strong bunch grass, grows 2 to 3 feet tall  

*IDENTIFICATION TIPS:*  
*Sheath:* Flattened, open, often purplish at the base.  
*Blade:* Folded in the bud shoot, folded along the midrib, narrow.  
*Ligule:* Small membranous.  
*Inflorescence:* Dense hairy seed head.

**INDIANGRASS**  
*(Sorghastrum nutans)*  
Spreads by short rhizomes, somewhat bunchy, grows 3 to 6 feet tall  

*IDENTIFICATION TIPS:*  
*Sheath:* Round, open, may be hairy at the base.  
*Blade:* Rolled in the bud shoot, flat, narrowed at base.  
*Ligule:* Prominent, the sides of which seem to be projections of the sheath margins.  
*Inflorescence:* Shiny golden yellow with long grayish hairs with twisted awns.
**BIG BLUESTEM**  
*Andropogon gerardii*

Bunch grass with short rhizomes  
Grows 6 to 9 feet tall  

**IDENTIFICATION TIPS:**  
Sheath: Round to somewhat flattened, open purplish at the base, usually hairy.  
Blade: Rolled in the basal shoot, silky hairs widely dispersed on the upper leaf surface.  
Ligule: Small membranous.  
Inflorescence: Turkey foot shaped seed head.

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**EASTERN GAMAGRASS**  
*Tripsacum dactyloides*

Forms large clumps, 6 to 8 feet tall, spreads by short knotty jointed rhizomes  

**IDENTIFICATION TIPS:**  
Sheath: Enclosing and flattened at the plant base to rounded at nodes near the inflorescence.  
Blade: Up to 1 1/2 inches wide, prominent midrib.  
Ligule: Ring of short hairs.  
Inflorescence: One to three spikes, female part below the male part. Seed is enclosed in a woody structure. Structures break apart at joints, with each part containing one seed.

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**Benefits of Planting Warm Season Grasses:**

- Provide high quality forage in mid-summer when many other forage grasses decline in quality and quantity.
- More drought tolerant and continue to grow after cool season grasses stop growing, since they can more efficiently use existing soil moisture.
- Stands are long lived and do not require reseeding.
- Can be managed to provided good quality wildlife habitat, while still providing quality forage.
- Serve as efficient scavengers of nutrients and also respond to supplemental nutrients.
- Capture leached nutrients due to their deeper rooting depths.

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More information on warm season grasses is available at  
The Grazing Lands Conservation Initiative website: [www.glic.org](http://www.glic.org)  
The NRCS Grazing Lands Technology Institute website: [www.ftw.nrcs.usda.gov/glti/homepage.html](http://www.ftw.nrcs.usda.gov/glti/homepage.html)

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