

# PRESS RELEASE



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## KANSAS NATIVE PLANT SOCIETY RECOMMENDS KANSANS GET TO KNOW THEIR STATE GRASS

On Kansas Day, January 29th, many Kansas school children will be learning about the state symbols as part of their celebration of the state's birthday. Citizens all over the state recognize the sunflower as the state flower and may also know the state tree, the cottonwood, and maybe even the state reptile, the ornate box turtle. But, how many know the state grass or even that Kansas has a state grass? Little Bluestem grass (*Schizachyrium scoparium*), the most recently chosen state icon, was named by the Kansas State Legislature July 1, 2010.

At that time, the four states surrounding Kansas all had state grasses, but not Kansas. Finally our quintessential prairie state made the decision to recognize the treasure of our grasslands by naming a state grass. With the support of the Kansas Native Plant Society, school children throughout the state chose Little Bluestem. They sent letters and pictures to the legislators asking them to name a state grass and that the grass be Little Bluestem. Because Little Bluestem is found in every county in Kansas and is a "kid-sized" grass, it was a very appropriate selection.

Kansas Day would be a good opportunity for both adults and children to visit Little Bluestem in a nearby prairie or pasture since winter is one of the most beautiful and showy times for the grass. Here are some clues for identifying our state grass. In comparison to its "cousin" Big Bluestem, Little Bluestem is a medium-sized grass, usually 2 to 4 feet tall. It is a "clump grass," with a cluster of multiple stems growing close together. This time of year the blades along the stem and the stems give the plant a copper color. The fuzzy white seed heads have a unique, slightly "curly" shape.

Because of the pleasing image of Little Bluestem in all seasons, and its ability to withstand drought, it is increasingly being used for landscape plantings for homes, parks, and schools. In its natural setting, the spring grass provides grazing for bison, antelope, and cattle. In the winter, cattle feed on hay from Little Blue. Not only do a variety of adult insects depend on Little Bluestem as a food source, the grass is also host to several caterpillars of beautiful butterflies and skippers. Many grassland sparrows eat the seeds of Little Bluestem to help them through the winter and also shelter under the protective clumps of the grass.

All of these attributes were instrumental in the Kansas Native Plant Society's decision to choose Little Bluestem as their "Wildflower of the Year" for 2013. They hope Kansans will learn to know and appreciate their State Grass this year.

For more information about Little Bluestem and teaching/learning materials about the Kansas State Grass, go to: [www.ksnps.org](http://www.ksnps.org) and click on "State Grass: Little Bluestem."