Big bluestem
Scientific Name: Andropogon gerardii

Life cycle: Long-lived perennial
Bloom: August - October
Growth form: Intermediate
Height: 4 - 8 feet

Fun Fact:
Sometimes referred to as the ice cream for cattle by ranchers. Cattle love eating it, but it must be consumed in moderation as it cannot withstand concentrated grazing.

Little bluestem
Scientific Name: Schizachyrium scoparium

Life cycle: Perennial
Bloom: August - October
Growth form: Bunchgrass
Height: 1.5 - 3 feet

Fun Fact:
Little bluestem’s name translates to “small red grass” in Lakota. Dried leaves and stems were rubbed into soft fiber to line and insulate moccasins.

Sideoats grama
Scientific Name: Bouteloua curtipendula

Life cycle: Perennial
Bloom: July - September
Growth form: Intermediate
Height: 2 - 3 feet

Fun Fact:
The state grass of Texas is a favorite bird food when the seeds ripen in late summer.
Switchgrass

**Scientific Name:**
*Panicum virgatum*

**Life cycle:** Long-lived perennial  
**Bloom:** July - September  
**Growth form:** Sod-forming or bunchgrass depending on ecotype  
**Height:** 3 - 6 feet

**Fun Fact:**  
The genus *Panicum* are essential food plants for caterpillars of banded skippers and satyrs.

Indiangrass

**Scientific Name:**
*Sorghastrum nutans*

**Life cycle:** Short-lived perennial  
**Bloom:** September - October  
**Growth form:** Intermediate  
**Height:** 3 - 8 feet

**Fun Fact:**  
Indiangrass, like Big bluestem and many other prairie grasses, uses a special form of photosynthesis called C4 that helps it conserve water in dry summer weather.

Composite dropseed

**Scientific Name:**
*Sporobolus compositus*

**Life cycle:** Long-lived perennial  
**Bloom:** August - October  
**Growth form:** Bunchgrass  
**Height:** 2 - 4 feet

**Fun Fact:**  
Animals may help Composite dropseed spread its seeds. Viable seeds have been found in rabbit droppings and bison hair samples.
Canada wildrye

**Scientific Name:**
*Elymus canadensis*

**Life cycle:** Short-lived perennial  
**Bloom:** June - September  
**Growth form:** Bunchgrass  
**Height:** 2 - 6 feet

**Fun Fact:**
As a good source of early spring livestock forage, Canada wildrye is one of the most palatable and nutritious grasses of the tallgrass prairie ecosystem.

Virginia wildrye

**Scientific Name:**
*Elymus virginicus*

**Life cycle:** Short-lived perennial  
**Bloom:** June - September  
**Growth form:** Bunchgrass  
**Height:** 1 - 3 feet

**Fun Fact:**
Often used in erosion control and streambank stabilization projects since it is one of the fastest growing prairie grasses.

Kalm’s brome

**Scientific Name:**
*Bromus kalmii*

**Life cycle:** Perennial  
**Bloom:** June - July  
**Growth form:** Bunchgrass  
**Height:** 1.5 - 3 feet

**Fun Fact:**
This short tallgrass prairie understory native has silky hairs on its seed heads, distinguishing it from the introduced and invasive Smooth brome.
Marsh muhly

**Scientific Name:**
*Muhlenbergia racemosa*

**Life cycle:** Perennial  
**Bloom:** August - October  
**Growth form:** Sod-forming  
**Height:** 1 - 3 feet

**Fun Fact:**
Though the name suggests that this native lives in wetlands, it also grows in drier upland soils with full or partial shade.

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Prairie cordgrass

**Scientific Name:**
*Spartina pectinata*

**Life cycle:** Perennial  
**Bloom:** July - September  
**Growth form:** Sod-forming  
**Height:** 5 - 6 feet

**Fun Fact:**
The species name derives from the Greek word “pecten,” or “comb,” in reference to the appearance of the plant’s flowering branches.

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Prairie dropseed

**Scientific Name:**
*Sporobolus heterolepis*

**Life cycle:** Perennial  
**Bloom:** July - October  
**Growth form:** Bunchgrass  
**Height:** 1 - 3 feet

**Fun Fact:**
The fountain of fine leaves smells like coriander in the fall and seeds can be ground into flour.
About Irvine Prairie

Irvine Prairie is a 77-acre prairie-in-progress on the farm of Cathy Irvine in memory of her husband, David. Dedicated on May 18, 2018, Irvine Prairie is possible because of a partnership between Cathy, the farm operator, Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation, and Northern Iowa Foundation Properties Corporation. The Tallgrass Prairie Center is restoring the acreage into an ecologically diverse tallgrass prairie that engages students and community members in learning about Iowa’s prairie heritage as well as appreciating the benefits provided by prairies. Irvine Prairie is a place for the community and students of all ages to learn about Iowa’s prairie heritage.

Over a period of five years, we anticipate planting about 100 species of native prairie plants, using the most genetically diverse and regionally appropriate seed sources available. We are also closely matching species with soil moisture conditions. Some hard-to-establish species will be started in our greenhouse and introduced as plugs. We are using the best known approaches to control weeds and encourage diverse, native wildlife. We are committed to documenting the work and carefully monitoring the results to guide future management decisions.

Find more information about Irvine Prairie at: www.tallgrassprairiecenter.org/irvine-prairie/

**Additional Resources**

- Iowa Department of Natural Resources: https://www.iowadnr.gov/conservation/prairie-resource-center
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service - Neal Smith Wildlife Refuge: https://www.fws.gov/refuge/neal_smith/
- U.S. Department of Agriculture - NRCS Plant Guide: plants.usda.gov

- Iowa Prairie Network: https://www.iowaprairienetwork.org/
- Illinois Wildflowers: https://www.illinoiswildflowers.info/
- Minnesota Wildflowers: https://www.minnesotawildflowers.info/
- Missouri Prairie Foundation: http://grownative.org/

**Growth Form Definitions**

- **Bunchgrass** - New grass stems arise close to existing stems forming a tight clump.
- **Sod-forming** - New grass stems emerge from underground stems (rhizomes) forming a patch that spreads.
- **Intermediate** - New grass stems arise from short rhizomes, forming a loose bunch that gradually spreads. In early restoration stages, these species will often form tight bunches similar to bunchgrass.

**Grasses**

Grasses are dominant plants of prairies and an essential component of any prairie reconstruction project. A seed mix with a balance of diverse grass and wildflower species helps create multifunctional plantings that compete better against weeds. Grasses are important members of the plant community due to their deep, fibrous root systems that hold and enrich prairie soils, filter water, and capture nutrients. Their foliage feeds herbivores from the smallest caterpillar to the largest bison, and their seeds support many birds and small mammals through the fall and winter.