

*Andropogon gerardii*

[Synonyms : *Andropogon chrysocomus*, *Andropogon furcatus*, *Andropogon gerardii* var. *chrysocomus*, *Andropogon glomeratus*, *Andropogon halli* var. *grandiflorus*, *Andropogon provincialis*, *Andropogon provincialis* subvar. *furcatus*, *Andropogon provincialis* subvar. *lindheimeri*, *Andropogon provincialis* subvar. *pycnanthus*, *Andropogon provincialis* var. *tennesseensis*, *Andropogon tennesseensis*, *Andropogon ternarius*, *Andropogon virginicus* var. *abbreviatus*]

**BIG BLUESTEM** is a perennial grass. Native to North America (from Canada to Mexico) it has bluish-purple stems with grass-like, bluish-green leaves (sometimes with red-tinged tips) that turn purple-bronze in Autumn (particularly after frost) and purple-tinged spikelets.

It is also known as Big bluestem grass, Blue grass, Red hay, Turkey foot, and Turkey foot bluestem.

*Gerardii* commemorates a French physician and botanist from the Provençal region, Louis Gerard (1733-1819) who wrote *Flora Gallo-Provincialis*.

Young boys in several of the North American Indian tribes including the Mandan, Omaha, Ponca, Apache, Hidatsa and Arikara Indians used the stiff jointed stems for making arrows for hunting.

Both the Omaha and Ponca tribes used the grass when building their lodges.

Big bluestem was a source of medicine for the Chippewa and Omaha tribes. The former used the roots to treat fluid retention and various stomach disorders. The latter made a decoction of grasses that was applied as a wash for fever patients.

This grass used to dominate the unending prairie grasslands of central North America until these massive areas succumbed to the cultivated grain sown by European settlers. Apart from say parts of the Mississippi valley authorities note that the remains of the bluestem prairies are basically confined to such spaces as the area between airport runways, or on railroad embankments and in old cemeteries. Big bluestem is enjoyed by bison and cattle alike and despite man's inroads can still form a part of prairie hay.

Big bluestem is an emblem of the State of Illinois (United States). It became the State's official prairie grass when the Governor signed a bill to this effect on 31<sup>st</sup> August 1989.

Apparently it had been chosen by a poll of students taken by the State Department of Conservation.

Medicinally the lower blades were used by local herbalists to prepare a tonic and the grass was also applied to a wound when it had caused a fever.