

switch grass *Panicum virgatum*

Kingdom: Plantae

Division/Phylum: Magnoliophyta

Class: Liliopsdia

Order: Cyperales

Family: Poaceae

ILLINOIS STATUS common, native

FEATURES

Switch grass is also known as tall panic grass or prairie switch grass. This perennial, sod-forming grass has leaves that remain on the plant into winter. The leaves are arranged alternately along the stem and grow close to the stem, giving the lower half of the plant a dense appearance. Each leaf has a hairy patch in the form of an inverted “V” where it joins the stem. The plume-like flower head and resulting seed head may be two feet in length. Flowers are three-parted. The fruit is a grain, about one-fourth inch in length. Switch grass may attain a height of three to six feet.

BEHAVIORS

Switch grass may be found throughout Illinois. It grows in moist and wet prairies, woods, fields, roadsides and rocky stream beds. Flowers are produced from June through October. Wind is the major agent of pollination. Growth begins each year from late April through mid-May. In its early growth, this plant is an important food source for grazing animals of the prairie. All parts of the plant may serve as food sources for wildlife. Switch grass turns a red-brown color in the fall.

HABITATS

Aquatic Habitats

rivers and streams; wet prairies and fens

Woodland Habitats

bottomland forests; southern Illinois lowlands; upland deciduous forests

Prairie and Edge Habitats

black soil prairie; edge

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