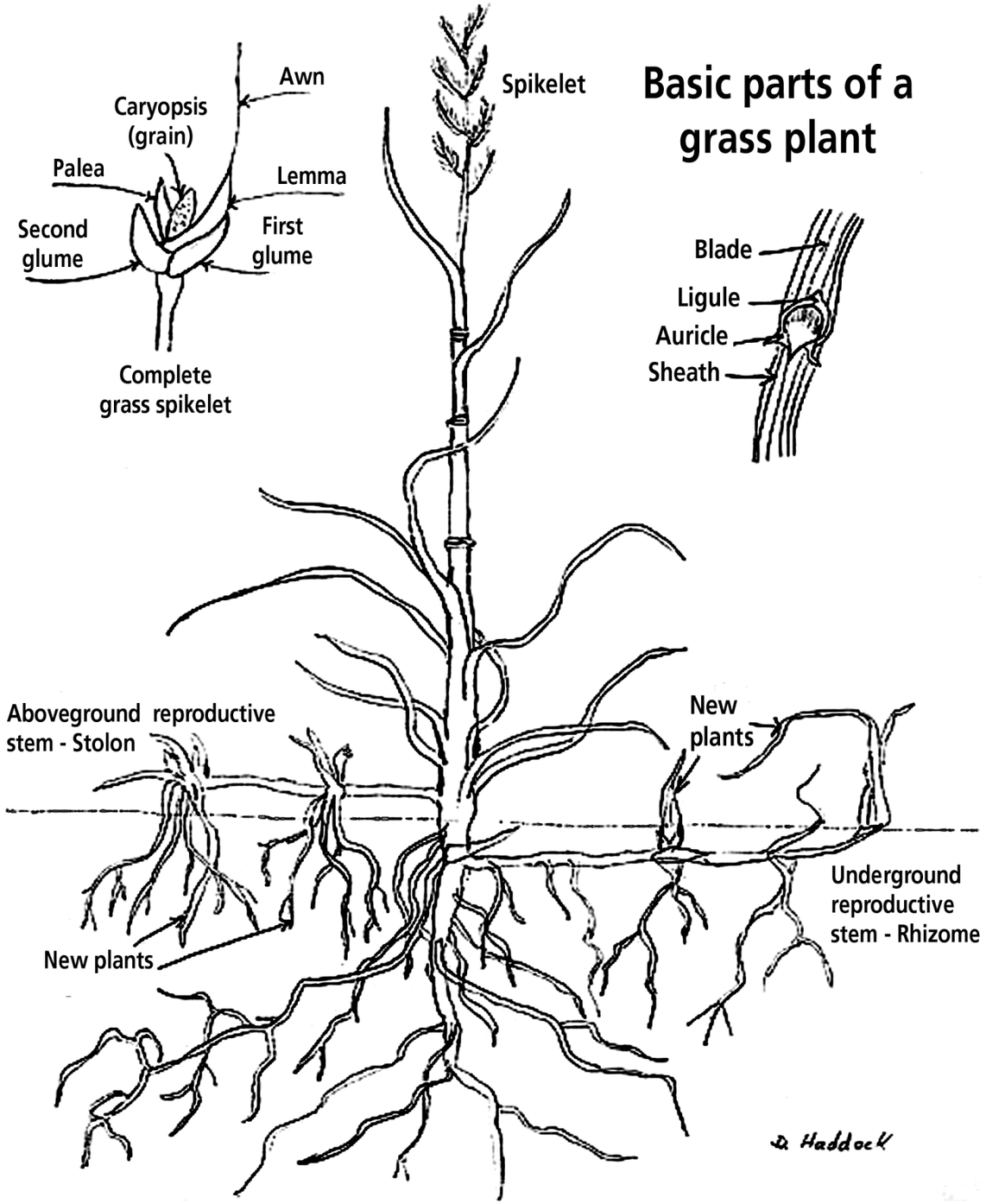

Useful books and websites

Brown, Lauren. *Grasses: An Identification Guide*. Houghton Mifflin, 1979.

Great Plains Flora Association. T.M. Barkley, editor. *Flora of the Great Plains*. University Press of Kansas, 1986.

Haddock, Michael John. *Wildflowers and Grasses of Kansas: A Field Guide*. University Press of Kansas, 2005.

Clark, Lynn G. and Richard W. Pohl. *Agnes Chase's First Book of Grasses*. Smithsonian Institution Press, 1996.

Kansas Native Plants Society: www.kansasnativeplantsociety.org

Kansas Wildflowers and Grasses: www.kswildflower.org

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For More Information

Tallgrass Prairie National Preserve is a public/private partnership between the National Park Service (the primary land manager) and The Nature Conservancy (the primary land owner).

The visitor center and historic Spring Hill Ranch house and barn are open daily 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. and are closed most holidays. All hiking trails and all outdoor areas are open 24 hours.

To learn more, please contact the preserve at:

Tallgrass Prairie National Preserve
2480B KS Hwy 177
Strong City, KS 66869
Phone: 620-273-8494
Email: TAPR_Interpretation@nps.gov
Web: www.nps.gov/tapr

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National Park Service
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Tallgrass Prairie National Preserve
Strong City, Kansas

Common Grasses Found at Tallgrass Prairie National Preserve

Big bluestem - 24 - 84 in.
Andropogon gerardii
Matures: July - September

Indiangrass - 36 - 84 in.
Sorghastrum nutans
Matures: July - September

The "BIG FOUR" grasses of the tallgrass prairie ecosystem

Little bluestem - 24 - 48 in.
Schizachyrium scoparium
Matures: July - September

Switchgrass - 24 - 84 in.
Panicum virgatum
Matures: August - September

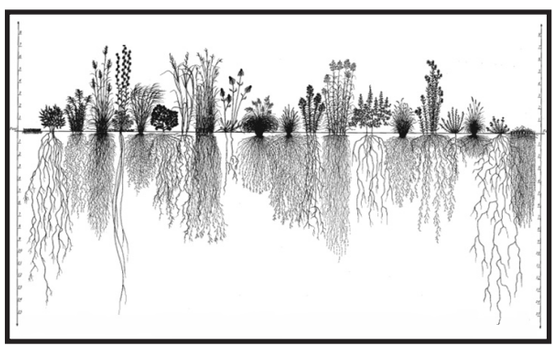
Tallgrass prairie once covered over 170 million acres in North America. Today less than 4% remains. Use this brochure while exploring the preserve to identify several common upland and bottomland tallgrass prairie grasses. Some of the grasses can be found in both areas. See how many you can locate!

An Endless Sea of Grass

With fertile soil and the beneficial interaction of three fundemental forces, climate, fire, and grazing, the tallgrass prairie ecosystem is ideal for the growth of grasses, with over 70 different species of grasses identified.

Many of these grasses can reach 6 to 8 feet or more in height, with most reaching their full height, given the right growing conditions, in the late summer and fall, leading to the helpful phrase “tall in the fall.”

The deep roots of tallgrass prairie grasses enables them to survive harsh conditions, with over 75% of the plant’s biomass located underground. This dense network of roots binds the soil together, like steel in concrete, and helps the grasses absorb moisture and nutrients.



Twenty-two grass species are illustrated in this brochure, divided among common tallgrass prairie upland, bottomland, and introduced and invasive species, along with their average heights and maturing times, arranged from earliest to latest.

Upland tallgrass prairie grasses

Upland tallgrass prairie is prime grazing land for a wide range of grazing animals, such as cattle and bison. Shallow, rocky soils and steep hillsides make upland tallgrass prairie difficult to plow for crops, which helps to preserve more of its original characteristics, like high plant diversity and dense, deep root networks. These combine to make upland tallgrass prairie very resilient and adaptable to a wide range of environmental conditions.

Buffalo grass - 2 - 8 in.
Buchloe dactyloides
Matures: May - June

Scribner’s panicum - 6 - 24 in.
Dichanthelium oligosanthes
Matures: May - June

June grass - 8 - 24 in.
Koeleria macrantha
Matures: May - July

Hairy grama - 6 - 28 in.
Bouteloua hirsuta
Matures: June - August

Side-oats grama - 10 - 40 in.
Bouteloua curtipendula
Matures: July - September

Purple lovegrass - 10 - 30 in.
Eragrostis spectabilis
Matures: August - September

Bottomland tallgrass prairie grasses

Bottomland tallgrass prairie remains an extremely rare part of the tallgrass prairie ecosystem. These large, level areas with their deep, nutrient-rich soils and better access to moisture were ideal for the planting of crops and other agricultural uses. Since bottomland tallgrass prairie is so rare and could support some of the tallest tallgrasses, the preserve is working to restore approximately 500 acres of this nearly extinct area to its natural state.

Virginia wild rye - 24 - 48 in.
Elymus virginicus
Matures: May - July

Eastern gama grass - 48 - 96 in.
Tripsacum dactyloides
Matures: June - September

Western wheatgrass - 12 - 36 in.
Pascopyrum smithii
Matures: June - September

Barnyard grass - 12 - 60 in.
Echinochloa muricata
Matures: July - September

Purpletop - 24 - 60 in.
Tridens flavus
Matures: July - September

Prairie cordgrass - 36 - 84 in.
Spartina pectinata
Matures: August - October

Introduced and invasive species

These grasses can be found in some areas of the tallgrass prairie ecosystem, presenting problems in certain circumstances. Some have been introduced for their forage value and for use in lawns, while others are less desirable native species that can become invasive in the right condtions. They can all fiercely compete with more desirable grass species for resources and for that reason the preserve monitors them closely.

Smooth brome - 16 - 48 in.
Bromus inermis
Matures: May - July

Kentucky bluegrass - 4 - 40 in.
Poa pratensis
Matures: May - July

Windmill grass - 4 - 16 in.
Chloris verticillata
Matures: May - September

Silver bluestem - 18 - 42 in.
Bothriochloa laguroides
Matures: July - September

Caucasian bluestem - 24 - 36 in.
Bothriochloa bladhii
Matures: July - October

Johnson grass - 24 - 84 in.
Sorghum halepense
Matures: July - October