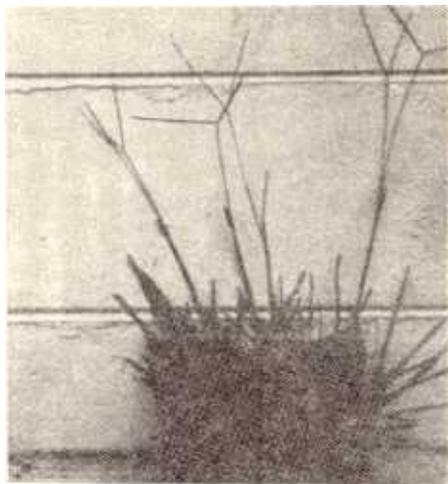


NATIVE GRASSES

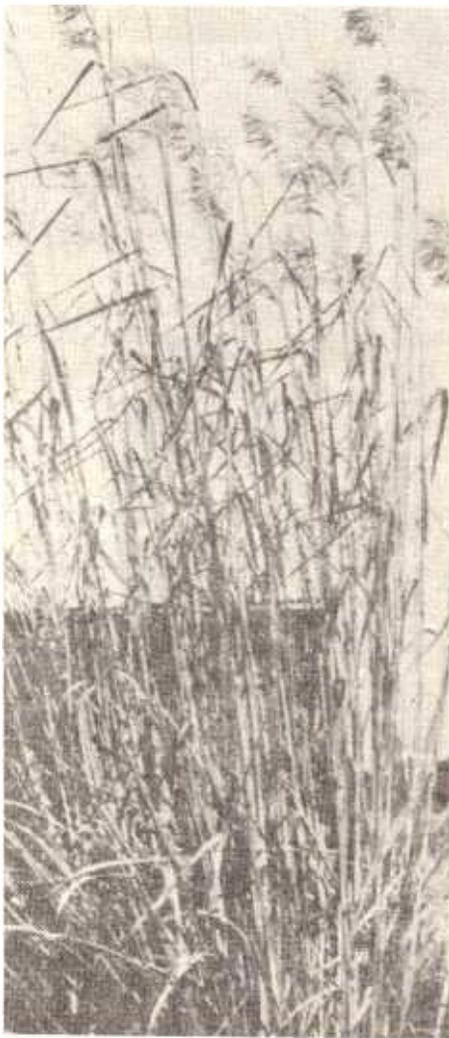
by Lew



Perhaps **common carpetgrass** (*Axonopus affinis*) leads the list of native grasses for lawns. This is perhaps not a native, although it is considered as such by a number of authors. Its greatest use is for lawns and areas where there is considerable foot traffic. Fortunately, seed is generally available commercially. Ten pounds of seed is usually sufficient to obtain a thick stand for one acre of lawn. Carpetgrass will respond to fertilizer, and should be applied if a more green, lush growth is desired.



Maidencane (*Panicum hemitomon*) forms dense colonies. In wet areas which may cause a problem maidencane is well suited. Maidencane spreads rapidly by rhizomes and produces very little viable seed. Transplant the rhizomes just about any time of the year except in dead of winter in north Florida, and a stand of maidencane will be the result. It produces dense, dark green leaves. It is excellent along stream banks and canal berms where erosion is a problem.



Plume grass (*Erianthus giganteus*) is a very conspicuous, robust perennial bunchgrass that will produce long wide leaves and dense silky seedheads during late September and October. Seed quality is unknown, therefore, transplanting during late winter or early spring is best. Plume grass will grow to about two to three feet with seed heads often six to seven feet tall. It is most useful in a background planting. It may also be used where a grouping of plants will be showy in the fall. (Note: It is not related to the common plume grass, which is an introduced species.) Dried properly, the seedheads are well suited for dried arrangements. Plume grass is well adapted to fertile, wet soils.

is the low maintenance requirement. Although most native grasses respond to applications of fertilizer, none is needed to provide normal growth. All of the native species are extremely tolerant to long periods of drought, wetness, and high temperatures. A



Bushybeard bluestem (*Andropogon glomeratus*) is a large, showy member of the bluestem family that produces dark green, leafy, bushy clumps 8 to 16 inches in diameter. The inflorescence is dense, feathery and very bushy white at maturity. Following frost in northern Florida the entire plant turns tan or reddish color. It is well adapted to the more moist or even wet soils.

OR FLORIDA YARDS

Yarlett

high resistance to disease and insects is a significant attribute of the native grasses.

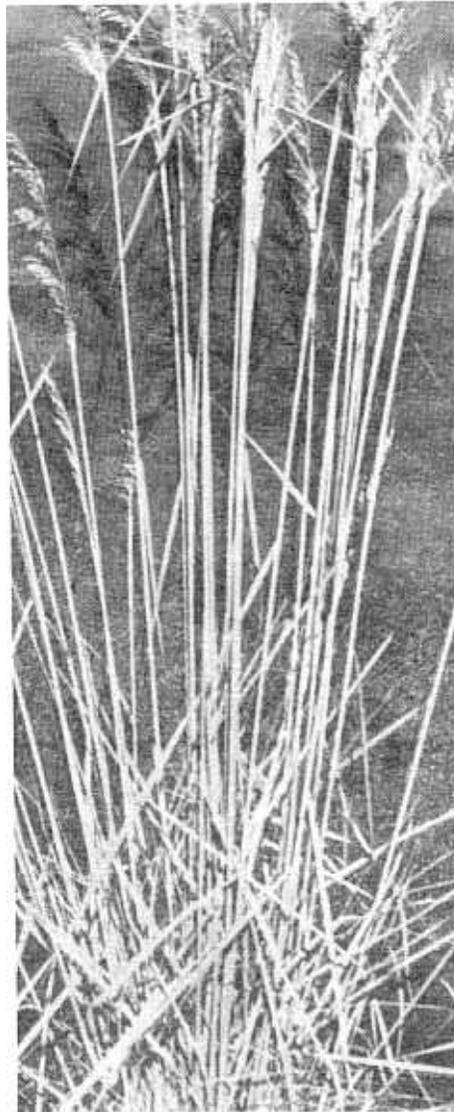
The only real problem is a source of supply. Viable seed production is generally very low and not available

through normal commercial sources. Most of the grasses have to be located in their native habitat and then transplanted. A word of caution: Be sure you have the landowner's permission and that none are on the list of environmentally protected species.

Photos from the book, **Native Grasses of Florida for Range Conservation** by Lewis L. Yarlett.



Longleaf uniola (*Chasmanthia sessiliflorum*) has attractive green leaves with an inflorescence well adapted for floral arrangements. Seed production is not high, but the seed is usually viable. Transplanting is best. Uniola is well adapted to heavily shaded, moist areas.



Two species of Indiagrass may be used successfully. **Lopsided indiagrass** (*Sorghastrum secundum*) is a bunchgrass. Yellow indiagrass (*S. nutans*) is a rhizomatous species. Both produce abundant seed which is easily hand harvested in early fall. Both species have attractive green upright leaves and produce an inflorescence of a golden yellow, about 18 to 24 inches long. Both are well suited to floral arrangements. The indiagrasses are not adapted to either wet, mucky soils or the very dry, sandy soils. Both species transplant easily.



Eastern gamagrass (*Tripsacum dactyloides*) is a very robust perennial grass with thick, knotty rhizomes. It is easily transplanted, shade tolerant, and best adapted to the more fertile soil. Gamagrass will produce leaves one to one and a half inches wide and as much as three to four feet tall. A series of plantings will provide excellent screening. The inflorescence is not conspicuous, but very interesting since the grass is closely related to corn.



Other species which show promise for landscaping include **sand cordgrass** (*Spartina bakeri*), Pineland threeawn (*Aristida stricta*), and Giant bristlegrass (*Setaria magna*).

Nurseries have a great opportunity for propagation of native grasses since they are easily transplanted and grow under nursery conditions. The species discussed are not on any environmentally endangered list.