

## **Pause for Plants, South Carolina's State Grass, September**

South Carolina's State Grass, Yellow Indian Grass, has been blooming in the upstate. Indian Grass was and still is an important plant of American prairies, and it grows pretty much in all states east of the Rocky Mountains and eastern Canada. Ten years ago a bill to establish Indian Grass as our State grass was introduced by State Representative Harry Stille now mayor of Due West, and the bill was signed into law August 21, 2001. Look for this grass along our roadsides, and protect it if you find it growing on your property. It is recommended as a native grass accent for gardens and landscapes. Indian Grass does best in full sun, but can tolerate partial shade. It is versatile as far as moisture is concerned. It is hardy and can survive fire and flood like a prairie grass should!

### **The first image shows Indian Grass growing along an Abbeville County roadside.**

Stalks of blooms first appear reddish brown, and then change to shimmering yellow, as flowers mature and pollen producing yellow anthers dangle down from each of the many blossoms. Flowers are also covered with white hairs that give them a silvery sheen, and give a silky feel when passed through your hands. Later as seed ( grain ) ripens, the blossoms the flower stalks appear brown.

Flowers of Indian Grass like those of nearly all grasses have no petals or parts to attract pollinators, because they are wind pollinated. Grass blossoms are uniquely structured. Flowers are called florets, and they and accessory structures make up their inflorescence called a spikelet.

### **The second image is a close-up of flowers with dangling yellow male anthers, white feathery female stigmas, and white hairs that give the blooms a silvery sheen.**

Indian grasses' botanical name, *Sorghastrum nutans* comes from Greek root words. *Sorguastrum* refers to its resemblance to the genus "Sorghum," but is a poor imitation at best! *Nutans* refers to the "drooping" of flowers at they open and mature.

So why would a prairie grass be chosen for South Carolina's state grass? Apparently in pre-colonial prairies were quite widespread in South Carolina. Clearing for farming, and increased development has eliminated most prairie land. One of the few remaining areas with some protected South Carolina prairie is the 263-acre Rock Hill Blackjacks Heritage Preserve in York County. This preserve is well worth a visit especially in late summer and fall, and spring.

Economically, grasses are the most important family of flowering plants because this family includes the world's crop grains such as rice, wheat, corn, and barley as well as sugar cane.



Photo shows Indian Grass blooming on a roadside between Due West and Hodges across from the stop sign at the intersection of highway 185 and 203. There are numerous populations in this area.



Here's a close-up of flowers with dangling yellow male anthers, white feathery female stigmas and white hairs that produce a silvery sheen.