

Sporobolus heterolepis Prairie Dropseed

This showy native is a long-lived perennial and one of the most grasses used in gardening. It is appreciated in border plantings because of its attractive, tidy appearance. *Sporobolus heterolepis* (Prairie Dropseed) also works well as a tall ground cover or an accent plant. Its narrow, fine-textured leaves flow and move from its mounded base in the wind. The foliage is a refreshing and bright medium green, which shifts to orange and golds in the fall and fade to bronze in winter. In late summer, airy flower spikes emerge from the center of each mound to create a mystical haze of textural contrast above the fountain-like foliage. The flower spikes give off a light, sweet smell, described often as cilantro or popcorn. This plant thrives in hot, dry sites in full sun, typical of its native prairie ecosystems. *Sporobolus heterolepis* is one of the few host grasses for Leonard's Skipper butterfly. Its foliage provides food for a number of grasshoppers, and many songbirds eat its seeds. Prairie Dropseed has vigorous fibrous roots and expands slowly from short underground rhizome; in natural settings, it spreads chiefly by self-seeding.

Botanical Name: *Sporobolus heterolepis*

Common Name: Prairie Dropseed

Family: Poaceae

Nativity: Great Lakes Native

USDA Zone: 3-9

Light Type: Full sun

Soil Type: Loam, Sand

Soil Preferences: well-drained soil, dry, rocky soils

Soil Moisture: Dry, Medium

Typical height (ft): 2-3' where foliage is 1-2' tall and flowering stalks are 1.5-3' above the ground

Typical width (ft): 2-3'

Foliage: Medium Green

Bloom Time: August, September

Bloom: Cream with golden pink highlights

Ecological features: Seeds attract birds, bunch grass form is particularly attractive as an overwintering site for queen bumblebees

Tolerance of: Deer, Drought, Salt, Heat, Dry Soil, Shallow-Rocky Soil, Black Walnut, Air Pollution

Additional notes: Warm-season grass. May take several years to establish. Clump grasses provide overwintering habitat for bees and other pollinators. Lightly fragrant flower (vanilla or buttered popcorn scent).

Companion plants: Globe thistle (*Echinops* spp.), Rattlesnake Master (*Eryngium yuccifolium*), Joe Pye Weed species (*Eupatorium* spp.), Bee-balm species (*Monarda*), Goldenrod species (*Solidago* spp.)

For more information see:

<https://www.northcreeknurseries.com/plantName/Sporobolus-heterolepis->

<https://www.midwestgroundcovers.com/plant/Sporobolus-heterolepis-NGN>

https://www.illinoiswildflowers.info/grasses/plants/pr_dropseed.htm

<http://www.newmoonnursery.com/plant/Sporobolus-heterolepis>

<https://wimastergardener.org/article/prairie-dropseed-sporobolus-heterolepis/>

Images of *Sporobolus heterolepis*:



Sporobolus_heterolepis_11zz.jpg

Aromatic flower spike



Sporobolus_heterolepis_12zz.jpg
Spikes form a wispy cloud above grass carpet



Sporobolus_heterolepis_kz1.jpg
Fountain-like foliage from its bunched grass base



Sporobolus_heterolepis_kz5.jpg
Mid-summer bright green foliage and aromatic spikes



Sporobolus_heterolepis_kz7.jpg

Gold and orange color begins to show in the early fall

Image choices for narrative:

Choice 1:

Sporobolus_heterolepis_kz1.jpg

Fountain-like foliage from its bunched grass base

Choice 2:

Sporobolus_heterolepis_11zz.jpg

Aromatic flower spike