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**Wildflower Spot – January 2014**  
John Clayton Chapter of the Virginia Native Plant Society

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## YELLOW INDIAN GRASS

*Sorghastrum nutans*

By Helen Hamilton, *Past-president of the John Clayton Chapter, VNPS*

Growing 2-8 feet tall, and topped by a large, plume-like, golden-brown seed head, Yellow Indian Grass is particularly attractive in the fall when the flowers produce dangling yellow stamens. The leaves are slender, ½ inch wide and 2 feet long, and blue-green, turning orange-yellow to purple in the fall. Blooming in September through October, the nutritious seedheads persist over the winter. Also in our area, Slender Indian Grass (*S. elliottii*) has narrower leaves, the panicle is less hairy, and the awns are noticeably bent.

Widespread in Virginia and over most of U.S. and Canada, Yellow Indian Grass grows in limestone soils, open woods, road banks and fields. It is easily grown in average, well-drained soils in full sun, and grows well in poor, dry and infertile soils. Slender Indian Grass occurs chiefly on the Coastal Plain from Maryland to Florida and Texas, and inland to Tennessee and Arkansas.

Along with Big Bluestem, Little Bluestem and Switchgrass, Yellow Indian Grass is one of the dominant grasses of the tallgrass prairie. Seeds are relished by birds and small mammals, and because the plant is tall and erect over the winter, it provides good cover for many kinds of birds and animals. This grass is a larval host plant for the Pepper and Salt Skipper butterfly. ❖



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**Photo:** Yellow Indian Grass (*Sorghastrum nutans*) taken by Helen Hamilton  
For more information about native plants visit [www.vnps.org](http://www.vnps.org).