
Wildflower Spot – December 2013
John Clayton Chapter of the Virginia Native Plant Society

BUSHY BLUESTEM

Andropogon glomeratus

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

This perennial grass looks like a small up-turned broom, with the flowers and seed heads in tight clusters, covered with many soft silky hairs. Bushy Bluestem grows about 4 feet tall, usually in clumps, the stems branching at the tips. The stem and leaves have a bluish cast early in the season, becoming tan later, and a deep orange-red in the fall and winter.

Bushy Bluestem is frequent in low, moist areas in full sun such as roadside ditches, meadows, and grassland swales. The plant is common in the Coastal Plain of Virginia and is scattered elsewhere in the state. The range extends along the Coastal Plain from Massachusetts south, and to California, the West Indies and Central America. Forming flowers in September through October, the stems and seedheads are visible all winter until new growth begins in early spring.

The genus name is composed of the Greek *aner* (*andr*), “man”, and *pogon*, “beard”. The Cherokee have used this species as a ceremonial medicine, dermatological aid, and to make a yellow dye. The seeds are eaten by birds and



small mammals, and the sturdy stems provide nesting material for birds and good cover for small animals. Bluestem grasses are larval hosts for skipper and satyr butterflies. All grasses are highly deer resistant. ❖

Photo: Bushy Bluestem (*Andropogon glomeratus*) taken by Helen Hamilton
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