

## SPLITBEARD BLUESTEM

*Andropogon ternarius*

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

**Description.** This is a distinctive grass in the fall with paired, silvery-white seed tufts at the ends of the stems. The fluffy seed heads catch the sun and often persist into winter. Growing in clumps, Splitbeard Bluestem has 1-4 foot stems. Narrow, ribbon-like leaves toward the base of the plant are glaucous and blue-green in the summer, turning copper, red and bronze in the fall. The flowers start to appear in late summer and are in full bloom in October.

**Habitat.** Preferring hot dry sites with poor soil but good drainage, Splitbeard Bluestem grows in southeastern counties of Virginia. This plant is common in dry places, thin woods, pinelands, old fields, meadows and roadsides, throughout southeastern U.S. from Delaware to Kentucky and southern Missouri, and south to Florida and Texas.

**Comments.** This is a stunning grass for a meadow or wildflower border with the sun back-lighting masses of the V-shaped seed tufts. Juncos and chipping sparrows eat the seeds. Splitbeard Bluestem is a host plant for the Wood Nymph butterfly, whose caterpillars feed on the foliage. ❖

