

# School-to-Nature



## Big Bluestem Grass (Turkey Foot)

There are MANY types of wild grasses that grow on Conservancy lands that go to seed in the late summer and early autumn; and Turkey Foot is one of the most fun to identify. You'll find it at King's Corner and at Trout Ponds Prairie.

It got its nickname because the long, strong seed stalks that form in the late summer spread apart as they are ripening, and they look very much like the feet of the bird they are named for. This makes them easy to spot. If you fan your fingers apart—this shape is what you should look for. The plant also features stems that are bluish-green in spring and summer. Stems turn green and tan late in the season. (See the photo.)

It grows in sunny, open areas of the prairie and woods edges, and can be from 3-10 feet tall fully grown (taller than a man!). It prefers full sun and medium to dry soils.

It was, and is, one of the favorite foods of the American Bison. It is one of the plants that hold the prairie soils in place. When settlers cut these plants down to create farms, it caused the soil to blow away in the wind. They called it the Dust Bowl of 1930. This plant is a true historical prairie native, still growing in Caledonia.

BH / DL