



Andropogon gerardii

'Rain Dance'

THIS NEW GRASS IS RED TIPPED AND RED HOT, EVEN IN THE COLD!

By Josiah Raymer

Expand sales, senses and grass programs with *Andropogon gerardii* 'Rain Dance', a new introduction available exclusively from Emerald Coast Growers. It answers the call for added interest in native plants and expands the big bluestem selection with a great new entry.

The tallgrass prairie's dominant grass, big bluestem is a warm-season grass that does most of its growing during summer when soil temperatures rise. Big bluestem has been known as the workhorse of the ornamental grass world: sturdy, reliable, but not much to look at. 'Rain Dance' changes all of that.

'Rain Dance' features red-tipped foliage, deeper green than the species, that turns totally maroon in fall. In fact, cool temperatures spread the red, painting every blade maroon.

Adding to the interest are upright, rich red flower spike clusters up to 4 inches long on red stems in varying tones. Seed heads branch into three parts (hence the common nickname "turkeyfoot grass"). They open and dance attractively despite the unattractive moniker.

Part of its attraction is its dizzying array of red, maroon, scarlet and green tones. Blooms appear from approximately August until frost, but the gorgeous, vibrant coloring gives it interest in summer and winter alike.

But 'Rain Dance' does not sacrifice performance for beauty. This hot new selection retains the toughness and self-sufficiency that make *A. gerardii* a go-to species for difficult

sites, in forms that are pretty enough for the garden.

The combination of a loosely upright, clump-forming habit with gracefully wide, arching foliage blades makes 'Rain Dance' a stunner as a focal point or in masses, beds or borders. While it is a natural for naturalization, it also excels as a screen or accent in native plant areas or prairie gardens. And, it is a good choice for erosion control. Deer and drought tolerant, it also tolerates drier soils fairly well, especially when established, giving it a versatility that appeals across climates.

'Rain Dance' grows to approximately 6 feet tall and spreads to approximately 3 feet. In dry conditions it may be a bit shorter, though no less stunning. Use caution, as it can get top heavy with too much shade, water or fertilizer and potentially topple over. A sun lover (though it can tolerate partial shade), it is hardy in Zones 3 to 9.

Finishing

Plant one liner per 1-gallon pot. From a 38-cell liner, 'Rain Dance' finishes in an average of six to eight weeks for spring sales. At liner planting, drench with a broad-spectrum fungicide as a preventive measure.

Fertilizer

Provide a low-level constant liquid feed of approximately 50- to 75-ppm nitrogen. Alternatively, a low to medium rate of slow-release fertilizer may be used.



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Irrigation

Water plants thoroughly and allow to dry between waterings, being careful not to overwater.

Media

Use a fertile, well-draining, disease-free commercial media. Andropogons are particularly sensitive to drainage.

pH & EC

Target electrical conductivity (EC) levels at 0.6 to 0.9 using the 2:1 extraction method. Maintain pH at 5.8 to 6.2.

Light

Provide high light levels of at least 5,000 foot-candles. Supplemental lighting should not be needed.

Temperatures


Provide day temperatures of 65 to 75° F. Keep night temperatures at 55 to 65° F.

Pinching & PGRs

'Rain Dance' typically does not require pinching or plant growth regulators (PGRs).

Pest Control

Follow standard sanitation practices and monitor and scout carefully to prevent any insect and disease activity. In particular, watch for leaf spots and rust, though they should not be a problem with the proper protocols in place.

Take preventative measures including managing humidity levels and maintaining good air circulation. Apply a broad-spectrum fungicide drench at liner planting. Also, consider a monthly preventative broad-spectrum fungicide rotation to help protect foliage. Thankfully, the introduction of increased disease resistance through breeding has greatly reduced the need for this, though it is still advisable. 

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