

Bird Friendly Native Plant of the Month

DECEMBER 2015

NC NATIVE PLANT SOCIETY

REEDY CREEK NATURE PRESERVE



Panicum virgatum



Field Sparrow

**Bird
Friendly**
NATIVE PLANTS

Photos by Will Stuart

Panicum virgatum Switchgrass

Masses of Grasses

It turns out that prairie and grassland birds are some of the most imperiled species due to grassland loss. Switchgrass clumps allow ground nesting birds to weave around the mounds including predators, unlike the continuous even cover of lawn grasses.

The seeds of Switchgrass are eaten by songbirds, rails, teal and geese and the foliage is a host to the Tawny Edged Skipper butterfly.

Growing Grasses

Switchgrass can be found in marshes, pinelands and open ground in a full range of moist to dry soil conditions. It thrives in full

sun and grows 4-8 feet tall with green to bluish leaves. Once established Switchgrass can be a sturdy barrier to erosion in tricky locations.

Switchgrass is easy to grow and not fussy, tolerating almost anything but standing water.

Landscape Uses

Grasses offer some of the best winter structure of the native plant palate. According to Carol Otteson in *The Native Plant Primer*, "Outstanding as a winter ground cover, Switchgrass is beautiful in a border, where its floppiness works to advantage; it weaves itself in among other ornamentals." The natural movement of Switchgrass in the wind is lovely to see.

Switchgrass flowers emerge as maroon, turn to tan and are a delicate haze over the plant. These can be planted in multiple clumps as a border or grouping, or it can be interspersed among perennial flowers blending texture and serving as a natural back drop for the colors in the border.

Bird Friendly Native Plant of the Month is a joint effort of the NC Native Plant Society and Audubon North Carolina.

Bird Friendly Trick: A good winter project is to rescue trees from climbing English ivy by snipping vines at the base, and then pulling the vines down as they die and release their hold on the tree. This saves you from using a mosquito service to spray the mosquitos hiding in ivy covered trees all summer. Less spraying means more caterpillars as food for baby birds.

