

GROWERTALKS

Culture Notes

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Growing *Sorghastrum nutans* (Indian Grass)

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Native grasses not only play a pivotal role in the American landscape, but they've carved out an important role as cornerstones of American gardens and commercial landscapes. Drought tolerance, pollinator friendliness and a resistance to pests and diseases are only some of their prized characteristics. While there are thousands to choose from, let's take a closer look at *Sorghastrum nutans*, or Indian Grass.

Sorghastrum nutans Golden Sunset.

Indian Grass is native to the American prairie, where it's part of livestock's diet. It's a relatively easy-to-grow, warm-season prairie grass that provides year-round splendor. Green glaucous spring and summer foliage is topped with golden bronze to amber fall inflorescences that hold most of winter. Great for native wildflower meadows, banks, borders and more, it's hardy in USDA Zones 3 to 10.

Emerald Coast Growers offers two varieties of *Sorghastrum nutans*:

- *Sorghastrum nutans* Golden Sunset is an early flowering, warm-season grass that forms neat clumps of wide, olive-green blades. Shapely and graceful, it has an upright/arching habit. Full, rich golden plumes rise to an impressive, but not overwhelming, height. Golden Sunset was selected at the Minnesota Landscape Arboretum, where the winters are long and hard. Deep rooted and drought tolerant, it's adaptable to a wide range of soil types. It reaches a mature height of 4 to 5 ft. in flower.
- *Sorghastrum nutans* Indian Steel is a warm-season, clumping North American native grass with metallic-blue foliage. Upright, reddish-brown flowers with yellow anthers bloom from July to frost. It grows to 6 ft. in bloom.

Potting: From liners, pot into 1- to 3-gal. containers. Recommend 1 liner plug per gallon. Example: 1 plug for 1-gal. container; 3 plugs for 3-gal. container.

Growing media: Medium to coarse, well-draining nursery container mix.

Growing temperature: Daytime temperatures can range from 65 to 80F (18 to 26C) and nighttime 50 to 65F (10 to

18C). Benefits from warm sunny days with cool nights.

Finishing time: In warm, sunny conditions, expect a 1-gal. pot to finish from a full 38-cell size plug in eight weeks. A 3-gal. pot may take up to 10 to 12 weeks.

Growing info: As a warm-season prairie grass, sorghastrum enjoys bright and sunny conditions, tolerates drought and cutbacks well. Best planted mid to late spring, blooms late summer, holding its inflorescences through most of winter.

Fertilizing: Low to moderate fertilizer needs. Recommend incorporating a controlled slow release or light top dressing with a quality nursery blend such as a 15-5-15 with micros during growing season. Likes slightly acidic pH range of 6 to 6.5.

Moisture level: Medium moisture needs, tolerates dry soil well in the environment, but enjoys moist, well-drained container media.



Pests and disease: Few disease or pest issues. A broad-spectrum fungicide rotation and occasional scouting for aphids and spider mites should be adequate. If holding dormant overwinter, a fungicide drench just prior to dormancy should help maintain crown and root health.

Sorghastrum nutans Indian Steel

Vernalization requirements: Not required.

Supplemental lighting: Supplemental daylight hours are not required, but bright, sunny greenhouse conditions are recommended.

Growth regulators: None.

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