



Historic Illinois and Percentage of Prairie

The tall grass prairie is found in the easternmost third of the Great Plains. It receives the most rainfall, averaging 30-40 inches a year. The tallgrass prairie is predominantly made up of Indian grass, switchgrass, and especially big blues stem, which can grow up to 12 feet high and a half an inch a day. The tallgrass prairie is the most lush, with much taller and denser grasses than the western prairie. An acre of intact tallgrass hosts somewhere between 200 and 400 species of native plants—3 out of 4 of them wildflowers. Each week from April to September, about a dozen new kinds of flowers come into bloom. An acre of good tallgrass may have 5 to 10 acres of leaf surfaces and produce 5000 pounds of forage a year. Grazing cattle typically gain 2-3 pounds a day on these grasslands. Today, what was the tallgrass prairie is now the 'cornbelt'.

<http://www.inhs.uiuc.edu/~kenr/percentprairie.gif>

Illinois Symbols

The land that became the state of Illinois was covered by prairie grasses. Big Bluestem may have been the most widespread and abundant grass throughout the true prairie. Big Bluestem grows in such tall and dense stands that it often prevents other grasses from growing around it by shading them out. In the past this resulted in large areas of almost pure big bluestem in the prairies.

Big bluestem grows to the height of between three and twelve feet (one to three meters). It has tall slender stems. The grass is green throughout most much of the summer ; the stem turns to blue-purple as it matures; thus the name bluestem. The seed heads usually have three spike – like projections and resembles a birds foot. Another common name for the bluestem is turkey foot. Big bluestem has deep roots and strong rhizomes. Consequently, it forms very strong sod. Big bluestem is excellent forage. It also yields two to four tons of hay per acre.

On August 31, 1989, Governor Thompson signed into law a bill designating the big bluestem as the Illinois Official Prairie Grass. The bill passed the General Assembly after the big bluestem was chosen in a poll of students conducted by the state Department of Conservation.

Amphibian:	Eastern tiger Salamander
Animal:	White-tailed Deer
Bird:	Cardinal
Dance:	Square Dance
Fish:	Bluegill
Flag:	The bald eagle represents the United States. In its beak it holds a streamer with the state motto on it. The state motto means that Illinois governs itself under the government of the United States. In the eagle's claws is a shield with thirteen bars and thirteen stars, this represents the first thirteen states. The two dates on the boulder are the dates of Statehood and of the State Seal. The ground around it symbolizes the state's rich prairie soil.
Flower:	Purple Violet
Fossil:	Tully Monster
Insect:	Monarch Butterfly
Mineral:	Fluorite
Motto:	State Sovereignty, national union
Nickname:	Prairie State
Name Origin:	Algonquin Indian for 'Tribe of superior men'
Prairie Grass:	Big Bluestem
Reptile:	Painted Turtle
Slogan:	Land of Lincoln
Soil:	Drummer silty clay loam
Song:	Illinois (lyrics by: Charles H. Chamberlin music by: Archibald Johnston)
Tree:	White Oak