

December 2017

NATIVE NEWS



Farewell and Thank You! Parting thoughts from Kevin Tungesvick

In February 1995, I was hired to initiate production of native plants at Spence Nursery. At the time, the business produced ground-covers and perennials, but derived most of its income from commercial landscape installation. By 2000, the groundcovers and non-native perennials were gone and shortly thereafter, the commercial landscaping. Those early years were mostly about education since we were introducing a product line that had not existed in central Indiana.

From the beginning we were committed to obtaining local genetics for our products. We scoured fens, woodlands, and railroad prairie remnants for our foundation seed collections. Our first seed production fields were purchased in 1998 and have grown to nearly 300 acres.

Developing this product line has truly been a rewarding endeavor. The greatest reward, however, has been seeing our product line utilized to restore quality local-genotype wetlands and prairies throughout Indiana. Hearing the hiccup song of a Henslow's sparrow in a *Sporobolus* dominated prairie restoration made possible by our efforts brings immense satisfaction.

I have had the privilege of working in the growing restoration community here in the Midwest. It is difficult to imagine a profession characterized by more dedicated and passionate practitioners. We are truly a group of happy warriors battling invasive species, collecting seeds, inventorying plants, all while being assaulted by mosquitoes, ticks, and the worst weather the Midwest has to offer. Fortunately, I will not be leaving this wonderful community, but rather moving to a position as an ecological consultant.

Spence Restoration Nursery will continue with the same product line including increased seed production. The commitment to providing high quality, local genotype plant material will remain. Our new Ecologist and Sales Manager [Amy Rhodes](#) will be happy to help you with your plant and seed needs. Thank you for your continued patronage and dedication to restoring our natural heritage.

Sincerely, Kevin Tungesvick

Plant Feature: Indian Grass (*Sorghastrum nutans*)

One of the classic grasses of the tallgrass prairie, Indian grass typically reaches its mature height of 5 to 6 feet in August. The showy yellow anthers that dangle from the inflorescence from mid August to early September are particularly beautiful when backlit.

Indian grass has earned an unfortunate reputation as a thug in a prairie restoration for a couple of reasons. First, the sowing rates for all tallgrass were formerly excessive. Indian grass should never be included in a mix at a rate exceeding 1 PLS lb per acre. Prairies intended to be forb rich for pollinators should utilize an even lower rate of 0.5 PLS lbs per acre or less. The second reason for this aggressive reputation is the seed source. Early restorations utilized selections from the plains states intended to provide forage for cattle. These broad-leaved selections have lush foliage and tend to lodge when mature, smothering the surrounding species. The Indiana native genotype Indian grass is very resistant to lodging, typically remaining erect through the winter.

Indian grass is a striking ornamental grass where its height may be accommodated. It has attractive yellow and orange fall color. In a restoration, Indian grass should be used with associates of the tallgrass prairie in our [Mesic Prairie Mix](#).

