

Elliott's Beardgrass

Andropogon gyrans

Description

Elliott's Beardgrass is an erect, bunched, perennial grass that may grow to 3 feet (1 m) in height. The upper part of the stem, just below where a leaf sheath begins, has tufts of relatively long, soft, upwardly-oriented hairs. The leaves are alternately arranged, often turn brown or orangish as they age, and consist of a sheathing basal portion and an elongate blade portion that is about approximately 3/16 inch (3-6 mm) in width on the lower stem leaves but up to 1/2 inch (12 cm) on the more crowded and conspicuous upper stem leaves that subtend the flowering clusters. The individual flowers, appearing in late August to October, are minute and are grouped in small spikelets that at their tip have a twisted hair-like projection, or awn, and at their base have a tuft of hairs similar to those on the upper stem. Linear groupings of the hairy spikelets, with their subtending crowded and enlarged leaves, often give the inflorescence a distinctive appearance in autumn.



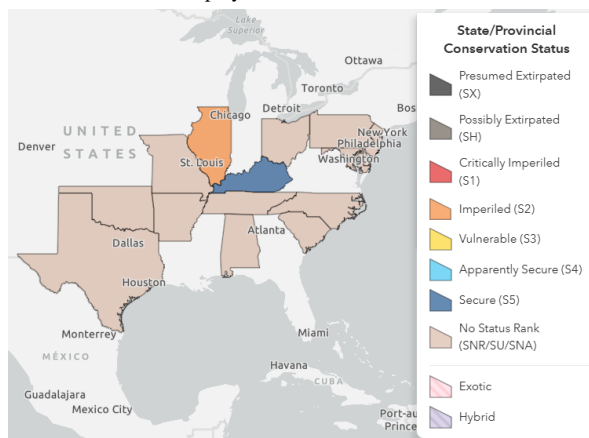
Photo source: John Kunsman, PNHP

Distribution & Habitat

Elliott's Beardgrass ranges from New Jersey to Illinois and South into Florida and Texas. In Pennsylvania, it is considered a southerly species and has been documented historically in the southeastern counties. It grows in dry to damp grasslands, clearings, open slopes, and successional old fields.

North American State/Province Conservation Status

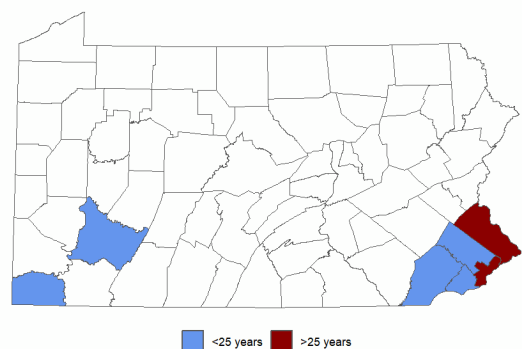
Map by NatureServe 2025



Current State Status

The PA Biological Survey (PABS) considers Elliott's Beardgrass to be a species of special concern, based on the moderate number of locations that have been recently confirmed. It has a PA legal rarity status and a PABS suggested rarity status of Rare.

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Conservation Considerations

The viability of Elliott's Beardgrass and its habitat may require maintaining early successional conditions and controlling invasive species. Active management, such as periodic mowing, may be needed to create the proper successional stage and ecological conditions for this species to thrive. Some populations have threats from the indiscriminate spraying of herbicide.

NatureServe conservation status ranks

G5 – Globally secure; **S3** – Vulnerable in Pennsylvania

References

- NatureServe. 2025. NatureServe Explorer [web application] NatureServe, Arlington, Virginia. Available at <https://explorer.natureserve.org> (Accessed: May 8, 2025)
- Pennsylvania Natural Heritage Program. 2025.
- Rhoads, A.F. and W.M. Klein, Jr. 1993. The Vascular Flora of Pennsylvania. American Philosophical Society, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.
- Rhoads, A.F. and T.A. Block. 2007. The Plants of Pennsylvania: An Illustrated Manual. 2nd edition. University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.