

# Chicagoland Grows,® Inc.

## Plant Release Bulletin #47

NEW FOR 2018–2019

Chicagoland Grows®, Inc., presents  
**Bad Hair Day Switchgrass**  
(*Panicum* 'Bad Hair Day' PP29,313)

Bad Hair Day is an intermediate to large-sized switchgrass, growing to 71 inches tall by 88 inches wide in full inflorescence after three year's in trial in northern Illinois (USDA Zone 5). Its stems are strongly upright, giving the plant a narrow silhouette until midsummer. The grayish, yellow-green foliage leaves are mostly pendulous, creating an attractive waterfall effect. The late-summer inflorescences are the most unique feature of this selection, as they are much denser than other switchgrasses, and also cascade like the foliage. The weeping inflorescences sway in the wind, creating a whimsical mop head appearance that gave it its "bad hair day" name. The cascading foliage and inflorescences persist well into autumn, turning an attractive light yellowish brown after going dormant. Plants have been strongly upright and persistent all winter, even with repeated snow loads. To our knowledge, this is the first switchgrass cultivar in the marketplace that is a hybrid of the bitter switchgrass (*Panicum amarum*) and of common switchgrass (*P. virgatum*). *Panicum amarum* is native to seashore sand dunes along the East Coast and across the Gulf states; combined with the attributes of *P. virgatum*, our selection is not only heat and cold tolerant, but may be more drought and salt tolerant than most switchgrasses. Developed by Dr. Jim Ault at the Chicago Botanic Garden.

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### Botanic Name

*Panicum* 'Bad Hair Day' PP29,313

### Common Name

Bad Hair Day Switchgrass

### Family

Poaceae (grass family)

### Origin

*Panicum amarum* 'Dewey Blue' was pollinated with pollen collected from various named selections of *Panicum virgatum* August 2007. Two hundred seeds were sown for germination in 2008, and 172 plants planted out that summer. The plants were thinned to six plants in 2010. 'Bad Hair Day' was selected in October 2011. The original plant was propagated in 2013, and then trial plants were evaluated in-ground for three years at the Chicago Botanic Garden (USDA Zone 5). Developed by Dr. Jim Ault.

### Hardiness

Likely cold-hardy to USDA Hardiness Zones 4 to 8 and heat-tolerant to AHS Zones 4 to 8.

### Bloom Season

The densely branched and weeping inflorescences are prominently displayed from early to mid-August until late autumn, with the panicle branches persisting into winter. The inflorescences averaged 30 inches long and 11 inches wide.

### Plant Habit

The stems are strongly upright until mid-August, when the cascading foliage and weeping inflorescences will broaden the plant into more of a fountain shape. The stems are strongly upright again all winter.

### Growth Rate and Size

A vigorous grower, even by switchgrass standards. Three-year-old plants in foliage measured 58 inches tall by 67 inches wide and in bloom 71 inches tall and 88 inches wide, whereas four-year-old plants in foliage measured 62 inches tall by 65 inches wide and in bloom 77 inches tall by 90 inches wide. Plants will likely grow larger in warmer climates. Like all switchgrasses, Bad Hair Day is a warm season grass, and so will be slow to initiate growth in spring but will grow vigorously as soil and air temperatures increase.

### Ornamental Characteristics and Landscape Value

Bad Hair Day provides multiple seasons of interest, from its upright growth habit to midsummer with pendulous grayish, yellow-green foliage; its dense and weeping inflorescences from late summer well into autumn; and its strongly upright stems again in winter that are an attractive light yellowish brown. Bad Hair Day is a large grass, so utilize it in the back of the perennial border as a backdrop for shorter plants. Grow individual specimen plants or mass it in larger landscapes. Effective for screening.

### Culture

This is a large grass with an extensive root system, so space and site it accordingly. Adaptable to clay, loam, and sandy soils, as long as they are well-drained. We have not seen this selection lodge in our trials, but to be sure grow it in full sun with good air circulation, and avoid overly wet and nutrient-rich sites. Leave the persistent stems up all winter for seasonal interest. Remove the old growth in spring. With its genetic heritage, this selection may prove more salt and drought tolerant than many selections of switchgrass (*P. virgatum*). Test it under these conditions and send us the results.

### Pest and Disease Problems

Good resistance to rust in northern Illinois trials. Not bothered by insects, or browsed by rabbits or deer.

### Propagation

Divide the tough and fibrous dormant rootstock into pieces approximately 2 inches across in spring and provide the divisions with 65° F bottom heat. Tissue culture propagation is also successful.

Chicagoland Grows® is a nonprofit corporation of the Chicago Botanic Garden, the Morton Arboretum, and the Ornamental Growers Association of Northern Illinois (OGA).

The Chicagoland Grows® Plant Introduction Program is dedicated to the evaluation, selection, production, and marketing of recommended and new plant cultivars. Plants selected for the program have proven to be adaptable to the Midwest and are made available to the commercial and retail landscape industry through an international network of growers and propagators.

For more information about Chicagoland Grows®, contact the Plant Introduction Department, Chicago Botanic Garden, 1000 Lake Cook Road, Glencoe, IL 60022, (847) 835-8301, or visit [chicagolandgrows.org](http://chicagolandgrows.org).