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GUIDE TO ORNAMENTAL GRASSES

Grasses - we see them everywhere - in lawns, on the beach, in forests and bogs, and along prairies and highways. Even basic crops, such as corn, wheat, and rice are grasses. Yet many people do not think of using ornamental grasses in their landscaping. The versatility, adaptability, and beauty of ornamental grasses make them perfect companion and counterpoint plants to flowering perennials, trees and shrubs. Some grasses can even be used as ground covers, accent specimens or focal points in the landscape.



Best known for their individual aesthetic characteristics, ornamental grasses give a rich sense of form, color and texture. Different varieties include those that form mounds or have vertical stems, are variegated or single colored, and those that can be either pendulous or erect. Ornamental grasses are a fixed element, they endure the entire growing season and continue through winter, always retaining their special characteristics. They almost come alive as they react to the wind and light.

There are three families of grasses which are primarily used in ornamental grass gardening. They are the *Gramineae* family (grasses), the *Cyperaceae* family (sedges), and the *Juncaceae* family (rushes).

ADVANTAGES OF ORNAMENTAL GRASSES IN YOUR GARDEN

1. They are relatively easy to maintain and most are very hardy. They usually do not require any staking or deadheading and are usually pest and disease free.
2. They are attractive through all four seasons.
3. They bring a natural element into the garden.
4. They are among the most versatile plants in landscaping. There is an ornamental grass for almost any environment.

HOW TO PLANT ORNAMENTAL GRASSES

- * Plant tall grasses 3 - 5 feet apart, short grasses 1 - 2 1/2 feet apart.
- * It is a good idea to enrich the soil with peat moss or compost, then mulch after planting.
- * Cut back in spring - new leaves will emerge in only a few weeks.
- * When they start to grow outward, leaving the center bare, grasses have used all the nutrients in the ground. Dig out the clump, divide it, and discard the core.

A FEW SUGGESTED ORNAMENTAL GRASSES

CALAMAGROSTIS 'Karl Foerster' (Feather Reed Grass)

2001 Perennial Plant of the Year. A clump forming grass with rigidly erect stems and a strong vertical line. Full sun to partial shade in average garden soil. Grows to 3-5 feet, depending upon amount of soil moisture. A cool-season grass, it begins new growth quickly in spring. Pinkish purple blooms appear in June-July, fading to buff in August through October. A well-behaved grass that doesn't reseed or get too broad. Combines well with shrubs; use as an accent plant or in a background planting. Propagate by division in spring. Three variegated forms, 'Avalanche', 'Eldorado' and 'Overdam' are also excellent and slightly shorter in height.

CHASMANTHIUM (Northern Sea Oats)

The tallest grass we offer that will tolerate a lot of shade. Clumping bamboo-like foliage, 3-4' tall. Attractive seed heads sway gently in the slightest breeze and make great cutflowers, fresh or dried. Full sun to shade.

MISCANTHUS VARIETIES (Maiden Grass or Japanese Silver Grass)

Tall grasses that offer excellent form and texture for the garden. Full sun to partial shade in good garden soil. (Note: If soil is too high in nitrogen or if plant receives too much shade, grass clumps might fall apart.) A warm season grass, it needs warm temps to begin growing. Attractive through winter. Panicles are good for cutting. Great as a screen or background, with perennials, as waterside plantings or in sitting areas in gardens.

'Gracillimus' - One of the most popular, for its graceful fountain-like growth habit. Very narrow, arching foliage. Lovely burgundy plumes develop in fall. 6-8' tall in bloom.

'Strictus' (Porcupine Grass) - Spiky foliage with yellow bands similar to zebra grass, but much more upright. Grows to 6 feet; plumes to 9 feet in September. Propagate by division.

'Variegatus' - Green and white variegated foliage. Grows 6 - 8 feet. Burgundy feathery plumes appear late summer to late fall. Propagate by division.

PANICUM 'Shenandoah' (Switch Grass)

A beautiful, easy to grow selection of a native prairie grass. In July, the foliage develops a deep red tint that intensifies through summer into fall. Deep red, airy flower panicles appear in late summer. The compact plants grow 3' tall. An outstanding grass for sunny areas. All of the Switch Grasses are easy to grow.

PENNISETUM VARIETIES (Fountain Grass)

An important ornamental grass characterized by globe-shaped mounds and dense bottlebrush flowers. Full sun and fertile soil with adequate moisture. Divide plants every 5 - 6 years to avoid dying off in center and to encourage flowering.

Alopecuroides - The primary hardy species of Fountain Grass. Flowers bloom profusely from late August through October. Stays attractive into winter. Grows to 3 - 3 1/2 feet tall.

Orientalis 'Karley Rose' - A long blooming variety with striking rose pink foxtail-like flowers over deep green foliage. Somewhat relaxed habit. 2-3' tall. Full sun to part shade.



***Making the world beautiful
one flower at a time.***