Ornamental Grasses for the Home and Garden

Mary Hockenberry Meyer and Robert G. Mower
Contents

Landscape Descriptions 1

Additional Ornamental Grasses, Sedges, Rushes 12

Grasses for Special Uses 12

Grasses for Dried Arrangements 13

Culture and Maintenance 13

Glossary and Key to Selected Types of Ornamental Grasses 14

References 19

Suppliers 19

USDA Hardiness Map 20

Index 21

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The New York State College of Agriculture and Life Sciences is a statutory college of the State University, at Cornell University, Ithaca, N.Y. 1973, revised 1986.
Over 100 kinds of ornamental grasses are suitable for garden use. They range in height from 6 inches to 20 feet and are grown for their attractive foliage color or texture, distinctive plant form, or showy flowers and/or fruit.

About 70 kinds are perennial, the majority of which are winterhardy in central New York State or other areas of the Northeast in USDA Zone 5. The perennial types can be used as ground covers or specimen plants; near ponds, streams, or swimming pools; and in perennial borders, rock gardens, or naturalized areas. All the annual types as well as many of the perennials have attractive flowers and/or fruits and are excellent for dried arrangements.

Ornamental grasses are relatively free of pests and diseases and usually require only minimal maintenance.

### Landscape Descriptions

#### Botanical name  Common name

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<th>Height</th>
<th>Duration, Hardiness zone*</th>
<th>Propagation</th>
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<th>Special soil, site:</th>
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*The winterhardiness rating for each plant is based on hardiness zones recorded by the United States Department of Agriculture, Plant Hardiness Zone Map, Misc. Pub. 814, Supt. of Doc., Gov. Print. Off., Washington, D.C. Central New York is USDA Zone 5; higher zone numbers indicate milder areas. (See map on p. 20.)

†Time of bloom: The period of time when the flowers and seeds are attractive on the plant.

1. 1st to 10th day of the month — E
2. 11th to 20th day of the month — M
3. 21st to 31st day of the month — L

‡Winter habit:

1. Evergreen ........................................ EV
2. Semievergreen .................................. SEV
3. Upright and buff colored ..................... UPB
4. Upright but no garden value ................ UPN
5. Dies back to the ground ..................... DB

§Uses:

1. Cut flowers for fresh or dried arrangements .... CF
2. Annual border .................................... AB
3. Temporary or short-lived, for small, limited areas ... TE
4. Potted plant (interior) .......................... PP
5. Perennial border — foreground .................. PBfg
   Perennial border — midground .................. PBmg
   Perennial border — background ................ PBbg
6. Specimen or accent .............................. SP
7. Ground cover .................................... GC
8. Rock garden ..................................... RG
9. Naturalized area ................................ NA
10. Water garden, near ponds or streams .......... WA
11. Screen ........................................ SC
**Acorus gramineus 'Variegatus'**  Japanese Sweet Flag
8”–10” perennial, USDA Zone 6  division
Flowers:  rarely produced, green, insignificant
Foliage: green with white stripes  Texture: fine
Plant form: low, open and spreading to upright-arching
Fall color: no change, beige
Special soil, site: moist soil, full sun, perhaps partial shade
Comments: attractive foliage and form for an indoor plant; requires moist soil; can be grown out-of-doors in warmer climates although exact hardiness not known.

**Arrhenatherum elatius ‘Variegatum’**  Bubbous Oat Grass
18”–25” perennial, USDA Zone 5  division
Flowers: white, yellow, pale green  5”–9” E-L Aug.
Foliage: white and blue green striped  Texture: fine to medium
Plant form: upright-open to low, open and spreading
Fall color: no change
Winter habit: UPN  Uses: perhaps PP, PBtg, SP, RG
Special soil, site: full sun or partial shade; tolerates dry soil
Comments: attractive foliage, especially in early spring and late fall; plants apparently grow best at cool temperatures, looks poor in midsummer and can be cut back at this time; indoor plants may be troubled by black aphids.

**Arundo donax**  Giant Reed
7”–20’ perennial, USDA Zone 7 or 8  division, perhaps seed
Flowers: white, light brown  12”–24”  M–Oct. into winter
Foliage: light green to blue green  Texture: very coarse
Plant form: upright-open to upright-arching
Fall color: brown
Winter habit: UPB, UPN  Uses: CF, SP, PBbg, WA, SC
Special soil, site: full sun, well-drained soil, adequate moisture
Comments: striking appearance due to leaf texture and plant form; excellent specimen near water; needs winter protection and rarely flowers in or below USDA Zone 6; coarse texture limits use; may spread by rhizomes in mild climates; the cultivar ‘Versicolor’ has variegated foliage, is shorter, 3’–6’ tall, and is not so hardy.

**Calamagrostis epigeous**  Feather Reed Grass
3’–6’ perennial, USDA Zone 5  division, seed
Flowers: green to dark purple  10”–24”  L-June–L-July
Foliage: green  Texture: medium
Plant form: upright-narrow
Fall color: brown
Winter habit: UPB  Uses: SP, PBmg, PBbg
Special soil, site: tolerates most soils, in sun or shade
Comments: grown for its overall appearance and slender, upright habit of growth, and tolerance of a wide variety of growing conditions; flowers are in dense panicles that spread open with age and persist into winter; usually forms a clump, but may spread by rhizomes in light, sandy soils; other variants available in the trade.

Figure 1.  *Arundo donax*. TR—two-ranked leaf arrangement.
Carex morrowii ‘Expallida’  Japanese Sedge Grass  
(C.m. ‘Variegata’, C.m. ‘Aureo-marginata’)  
6”–12” perennial, USDA Zone 6 division  
Flowers: rare, insignificant, green  
Foliage: yellow, green and white striped    Texture: fine  
Plant form: low, tufted, clump forming  
Fall color: no change  
Winter habit: DB  Uses: PP, PBfg, SP, RG, WA  
Special soil, site: full sun to light shade, moist soil  
Comments: attractive foliage and form; excellent potted plant; several variants available in the trade.

Carex pendula  Sedge Grass  
2’–3½’ perennial, USDA Zone 5 division  
Flowers: brown, pendulous  2”–4”  L-June–M-Aug.  
Foliage: dark green    Texture: medium  
Plant form: mound to upright-arching  
Fall color: no change  
Winter habit: SEV  Uses: PBmg, PBfg, SP, WA  
Special soil, site: partial shade, full sun, moist soil  
Comments: very attractive foliage, dark green color and good texture; may be slow to grow from divisions; leaves may turn brown from winter injury.

Chasmanthium latifolium  Northern Sea Oats; Spangle Grass  
(Uniola latifolia)  
3’–5’ perennial, USDA Zone 5 division, seed  
Flowers: dark green, reddish brown fading to bronze  10”–12”  L-July into winter  
Foliage: green    Texture: medium  
Plant form: upright-narrow to upright-arching  
Fall color: bronze, Oct.  
Winter habit: upright, bronze to light brown    Uses: CF, PBmg, PBbg, Sp, WA, NA  
Special soil, site: does best in partial shade and fertile, well-drained soil  
Comments: excellent flowers and plant form, especially attractive during fall and winter; exposure to full sun may result in shorter, light green plants; seed may be difficult to germinate.

Coix lacryma-jobi  Job’s Tears  
3’–4’ annual seed  
Flowers: gray black, green  3”–4”  M-June–L-Sept.  
Foliage: green to yellow green    Texture: coarse  
Plant form: upright-open to upright-narrow  
Fall color: brown  
Winter habit: UPN, DB   Uses: AB, SP, curiosity, WA  
Special soil, site: grows best in partial shade with adequate moisture  
Comments: curiosity plant due to beadlike seeds, beads can be used for necklaces; tolerates excessive soil moisture; coarse texture limits landscape potential; lower leaves often become brown and die.
**Cortaderia selloana**  Pampas Grass
3'-20' hort. annual, USDA Zone 5-7 division, seed
perennial, USDA Zone 8
Flowers: white, perhaps pale pink  20"-36"  L-Sept.-L-Oct.
Foliage: green  Texture: fine to medium
Plant form: upright-open to upright-narrow
Fall color: beige
Winter habit: DB, UPN  Uses: CF, PBbg, SP, WA, SC
Special soil, site: fertile, well-drained soil; full sun or partial shade
Comments: striking flowers and plant form; may be difficult to place correctly in the landscape because of large size, perhaps best suited as a specimen in a large garden area; questionable use north of USDA Zone 7 because of limited hardiness; best propagation is by division of the female (showiest) plants.

**Deschampsia caespitosa**  Tufted Hair Grass
20"-36" perennial, USDA Zone 5 division, seed
Flowers: white, light green  10"-15"  L-June-L-Aug.
Foliage: dark to medium green  Texture: fine to medium
Plant form: mound
Fall color: light brown
Winter habit: UPN  Uses: CF, PBfg, SP, RG, WA, NA
Special soil, site: full sun, partial to full shade; adequate moisture
Comments: long flowering period; good plant form, may become open and unattractive by late summer; several variants with yellow flowers are available.

**Elymus arenarius**  Blue Lyme Grass
20"-25" perennial, USDA Zone 4 division
Flowers: beige, light green  3"-4" sporadic
Foliage: light blue, glaucous  Texture: coarse
Plant form: irregular to low, open and spreading
Fall color: brown, beige
Winter habit: DB  Uses: PP, PBfg, PBmg,SP, WA
Special soil, site: full sun; tolerates damp or moist, very sandy soils
Comments: coarse, light blue foliage; good seashore plant; in light sandy soils, may spread extensively by rhizomes; complete loss of color with first frost; another species, *Elymus glaucus*, may be preferable for garden use — it has the same foliage color and is not rhizomatous, but is rarely available in the trade.
Erageostis curvula  Weeping Love Grass
3'-5' perennial, USDA Zone 5 division, seed
Flowers: dark gray green  10"-15" L-June-E-Aug.
Foliation: light green  Texture: fine
Plant form: upright-open to upright-arching
Fall color: brown, beige
Winter hard: UPB  Uses: CF, PBbg, SP, NA
Special soil, site: needs adequate space to develop open and arching form;
full sun
Comments: attractive form throughout summer and until hard fall frosts; may
become prostrate from heavy winds and rain; self-sows liberally.

Erianthus ravennae  Plume Grass, Ravennae Grass
7'-15' perennial, USDA Zone 5 division
Flowers: silvery white, beige  12"-20" L-Sept.-L-Oct.
Foliation: green  Texture: coarse
Plant form: upright-open
Fall color: brown, tinged with orange or purple
Winter hard: UPB  Uses: CF, PBbg, SP, WA, SC
Special soil, site: full sun; moist, fertile, well-drained soil
Comments: attractive flowers and form, large and stately appearance; easy to
grow; in colder climates, flowering may be limited by early frosts; may self-sow
liberally in warm climates.

Festuca amethystina  Large Blue Fescue
1½'-3' perennial, USDA Zone 5 division, seed
Flowers: light bright green  1"-2" M-June-M-July.
Foliation: blue to blue green  Texture: fine
Plant form: tufted
Fall color: blue to blue green
Winter hard: UPN  Uses: PBfg, SP, RG, GC
Special soil, site: full sun; well-drained soil
Comments: dense, tufted foliage that may vary in color; grows best in full sun
with good drainage; tolerates warmer climates better than Festuca ovina
'Glauc.'
*Festuca ovina 'Glaucia'*  Blue Fescue
6’-12” perennial, USDA Zone 4 division
Flowers: green, beige 1”-2” E-June-E-July.
Foliage: silvery blue, light blue, blue green,  Texture: fine variable to shades of green
Plant form: low, tufted, clump forming
Fall color: no change
Winter habit: EV  Uses: PBfg, SP, GC, RG
Special soil, site: must have well-drained soil; prefers cool climates (north of Philadelphia, Pa.); full sun or partial shade
Comments: attractive foliage color and form, evergreen; if grown in poorly drained soil, the plants require more-frequent division (every 1-2 years); may benefit from being cut back after flowering; difficult to grow in heavy clay soil in warm climates; *Festuca ovina* var. *duriuscula*, hard fescue, has wider, firmer leaves of dark blue color. Many variants of this species are sold with different foliage colors and flowering habits.

*Helictotrichon sempervirens*  Blue Oat Grass
2’-3’ perennial, USDA Zone 5 division
Flowers: beige 3”-4” sporadic
Foliage: light, glaucous blue  Texture: fine to medium
Plant form: mound to tufted, clump forming
Fall color: no change
Winter habit: SEV to UPB  Uses: PBmg, PBfg, SP, RG
Special soil, site: full sun, partial shade; well-drained soil
Comments: attractive and distinctive foliage and form; may become weak and open in shady locations; excessive humidity or moist conditions may promote leaf spot diseases.

*Holcus mollis 'Variegatus'*  Velvet Grass
4’-12” perennial, USDA Zone 5 division
Flowers: green and white 1”-2” E-June-E-Aug.
Foliage: green and white striped  Texture: fine to medium
Plant form: low, open and spreading
Fall color: no change
Winter habit: SEV  Uses: PBfg, SP, GC, RG
Special soil, site: full sun, perhaps light shade
Comments: low growing with attractive striped foliage; can be troublesome because of creeping rhizomes, especially in sandy soils.
**Hordeum jubatum**  Squirrel’s-Tail Grass, Foxtail Barley

20”-30” biennial, perennial, USDA Zone 5  
Seed

Flowers: shining dark red, purple, 3”-4” E-June—E-July  
or green, beige with age

Foliage: green  
Texture: fine to medium

Plant form: upright-open

Fall color: brown

Winter habit: UPN, DB  
Uses: CF, TE, PBmg, NA

Special soil, site: full sun; tolerant of a wide variety of soils

Comments: early flowering, very showy when in flower; loose, open form easily becomes prostrate because of winds and rain; self-sows readily and may flower sporadically all summer; usually unattractive by mid-August and can be cut back at this time; long, sharp awns in the flowers may injure animals.

**Hystrix patula**  Bottlebrush Grass

2”-4” perennial, USDA Zone 5  
Seed, division

Flowers: light green 5”-8” E-Aug.—M-Oct.

Foliage: green  
Texture: medium

Plant form: upright-open

Fall color: beige

Winter habit: UPN-UPB  
Uses: CF, PBmg, WA, NA

Special soil, site: partial shade is best, will grow in full sun; moist, well-drained soil

Comments: upright form; numerous and attractive flowers and long blooming period.

**Miscanthus sacchariflorus**  Eulalia Grass

5’-10’ perennial, USDA Zone 5  
Division, perhaps seed

Flowers: silvery white 7”-10” E-Aug. into winter

Foliage: green  
Texture: medium to coarse

Plant form: upright-narrow to upright-open

Fall color: orange rust in Sept.

Winter habit: UPN, UPB  
Uses: CF, PBbg, WA, NA, SC

Special soil, site: full sun

Comments: late summer flowering period, attractive flowers; tall graceful appearance; in light sandy soils, especially in mild climates, this species can be invasive because of rhizomes and its tendency to reseed itself; lower leaves often become brown and unattractive; may require staking if grown in shade or very fertile soils.

Figure 9. **Hystrix patula**. A—two spike inflorescences; a—awn.

Figure 10. **Miscanthus sacchariflorus**. A—inflorescence.
**Miscanthus sinensis** Eulalia Grass

**(Eulalia japonica)** Chinese Silver Grass

7'-13' perennial, USDA Zone 4 division

Flowers: pale pink or red 7"-10" September

Foliage: green  Texture: medium

Plant form: upright-open

Fall color: beige, perhaps orange brown

Winter habit: UPN, UPB  Uses: CF, PBbg, SP, WA, NA, SC

Special soil, site: full sun

Comments: attractive fall flowers; plants not extremely large; may require staking, especially if grown in shade or very fertile soils.

**Miscanthus sinensis ‘Gracillimus’** Maiden Grass

3'-6' perennial, USDA Zone 5 division

Flowers: reddish pink, beige with age 5'-8' E-Oct. into winter

Foliage: green, conspicuous white midvein  Texture: fine

Plant form: upright-arching

Fall color: pale green

Winter habit: UPB  Uses: CF, PP, PBmg, PBbg, SP, WA, SC

Special soil, site: full sun or partial shade

Comments: attractive flowers and upright form; long, curly, arching leaves; in cold climates, flowers may be injured by early fall frosts.

**Miscanthus sinensis ‘Variegatus’** Striped Eulalia Grass

3'-6' tender perennial, USDA Zone 5; hardy perennial, USDA 7 division

Flowers: pale pink, turning beige 5'-8' L-Sept.-Oct.

Foliage: yellow, white, and green striped  Texture: medium

Plant form: upright-open

Fall color: pale green, beige

Winter habit: UPB, UPN  Uses: CF, PBmg, SP, WA, SC

Special soil, site: full sun

Comments: one of the tallest variegated grasses; attractive foliage; good specimen plant; not so hardy or robust as the species; rarely flowers in USDA Zone 5; may require staking if grown in very fertile, shady locations.
**Miscanthus sinensis 'Zebrinus'**  
Zebra Grass  

4'-7' perennial, USDA Zone 5 division  

*Flowers:* pale yellow, beige  8”-12” M-Sept.-M-Oct.  

*Foliage:* green with horizontal yellow bands  *Texture:* medium  

*Plant form:* upright-narrow to upright-open  

*Fall color:* beige or brown  

*Winter habit:* UPN  *Uses:* CF, PBtg, SP, WA, SC  

*Special soil, site:* full sun, light shade  

*Comments:* interesting and unique foliage; ideal specimen plant; late flowering period, flowers may be injured by early fall frosts; plants require staking if grown in shady locations. Several other forms of *Miscanthus sinensis* are available, the most notable being (1) *M. sinensis* 'Silver Feather' (also known as 'Silberfarber'), 6'-9' in height, flowers in August, much earlier than the species, with flowers well above the foliage; (2) *M. sinensis* 'Strictus,' 6'-8' tall, has foliage similar to *M. sinensis* 'Zebrinus,' although the yellow bands are usually more pronounced, and overall form is very upright-narrow and much straighter than *M. sinensis* 'Zebrinus'; and (3) *M. sinensis* 'Purpurascens,' red-leaved miscanthus, 3'-5' tall, foliage develops red coloring as summer progresses, distinctive red fall color, flowers earlier than the species.

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**Molina caerulea 'Variegata'**  
Purple Moor Grass  

1'-2' perennial, USDA Zone 5 division  

*Flowers:* yellow, green, purple  5”-8” L-June-L-Aug.  

*Foliage:* yellow, green striped  *Texture:* fine  

*Plant form:* upright-arching  

*Fall color:* none, brown with hard frosts  

*Winter habit:* DB  *Uses:* PP, PBtg, SP, GC, RG, WA  

*Special soil, site:* full sun or partial shade  

*Comments:* attractive foliage from mid-May until early November; long flowering period; low growing; moist, humid conditions may promote rust or leaf spot diseases.

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**Oplismenus hirtellus 'Variegatus'**  
Basket Grass  

2'-3', trailing stems indoor plant division, cuttings  

*Flowers:* green, dark red  1"-2" sporadic  

*Foliage:* green, white, pink, purple striped  *Texture:* medium  

*Plant form:* low, open and spreading, to irregular  

*Fall color:*  

*Winter habit:*  

*Uses:* PP  

*Special soil, site:* needs adequate moisture, soil should not be allowed to dry out; requires high light to develop pink, purple stripes  

*Comments:* good hanging-basket plant, grows rapidly, attractive foliage; may require high light (greenhouse/conservatory) for dense growth; out-of-doors winter-hardiness is not known.
**Panicum virgatum**  
Switch Grass  
3’-6’ perennial, USDA Zone 5 division, seed  
Flowers: dark red purple fading to beige  12”-16”  L-July-E Sept.  
Foliage: green  Texture: medium  
Plant form: upright-narrow  
Fall color: medium to bright yellow, mid-Sept.-Oct.  
Winter habit: UPB  Uses: CF, PBmg, NA, WA, SC  
Special soil, site: full sun, partial shade  
Comments: dense, upright form persists into winter for garden interest and as a valuable wildlife cover; good fall color in the Northeast; in light, sandy soils, may spread slowly because of rhizomes; may require staking in shady locations; *P. virgatum* ‘Rubrum’, Red Switch Grass, 3’-4’ tall, has foliage tinged with red and with crimson fall color; *P. virgatum* ‘Strictum’ is more upright, shorter, 3’-4’ tall, and blooms slightly earlier.

**Pennisetum alopecuroides**  
Fountain Grass  
4’-4½’ perennial, USDA Zone 5 division  
Flowers: coppery tan or reddish  6”-8”  L-Aug.-E-Oct.  
Foliage: green  Texture: medium-fine  
Plant form: mound  
Fall color: yellow, mid-Oct.  
Winter habit: UPB, UPN  Uses: PBfg, PBmg, SP, WA  
Special soil, site: full sun, light shade; needs adequate room to develop  
Comments: excellent form, numerous flowers, late blooming period, showy fall color; division is required every 5-10 years to prevent the center of the plant from dying out; the cultivar ‘Hamein’ is shorter and more compact, reaching about 2½’ tall.

**Pennisetum setaceum (P. ruppelii)**  
Crimson Fountain Grass  
2’-3’ hort. annual, USDA Zone 5-8; perennial, USDA Zone 8-9  seed  
Flowers: dark purple, red  9”-12”  L-July-E-Oct.  
Foliage: green, purple to dark red in variants  Texture: fine  
Plant form: mound to upright-arching  
Fall color: beige  
Winter habit: DB, UPN  Uses: AB, PBmg, PBfg, SP, WA  
Special soil, site: full sun or partial shade  
Comments: numerous and attractive flowers; in warm or mild climates may become weedy; in colder areas becomes unattractive after hard frosts in the fall.
**Pennisetum villosum**  Feather Top
18”-30” hort. annual, USDA Zone 5-8; perennial, USDA Zone 8-9 seed
**Flowers:** tawny, white, light green  3”-5” L-July-L-Sept.
**Foliage:** green  **Texture:** medium
**Plant form:** mount to irregular
**Fall color:** beige
**Winter habit:** DB or UPN  **Uses:** AB, PBfg
**Special soil, site:** full sun or partial shade; adequate moisture
**Comments:** attractive flowers; dies with first frost in colder areas; plants may become open and unattractive from exposure to heavy winds and rain.

**Phalaris arundinacea ‘Picta’**  Ribbon Grass
2’-4½’ perennial, USDA Zone 4 division
**Flowers:** white, pale pink  4”-6” E-June-M-July
**Foliage:** white, green, perhaps pink striped  **Texture:** medium
**Plant form:** upright-open
**Fall color:** beige
**Winter habit:** DB  **Uses:** PBmg, SP, WA, perhaps GC
**Special soil, site:** full sun or partial shade; tolerates wet soil
**Comments:** attractive foliage color in early spring and midsummer; good plant for poor soil; may be invasive in light sandy soils because of rhizomes; foliage fades and becomes brown by mid-August; plants often become unattractive from winds and rain; can benefit from being cut back to the ground in midsummer, allowing new foliage to develop.

**Rhynchochloa repens**  Ruby Grass
2’-4’ hort. annual, USDA Zone 5-9; perennial, USDA Zone 9 seed
**Flowers:** ruby red fading to pink or silvery white  6”-10” L-July-E-Oct.
**Foliage:** green, upper leaves often tinged with purple  **Texture:** medium
**Plant form:** upright-open to irregular
**Fall color:** pale green
**Winter habit:** UPN  **Uses:** CF, AB, PBfg, PBmg
**Special soil, site:** full sun
**Comments:** long fall blooming period, very attractive flowers; may become open and unattractive in shady locations or very fertile soil; flowers may be injured by early fall frosts in cold regions.

**Spartina pectinata ‘Aureo-marginata’**  Cord Grass
(S. michauziana ‘Aureo-marginata’)
4’-8’ perennial, USDA Zone 5 division
**Flowers:** light yellow, beige  6”-15” L-Aug.-L-Sept.
**Foliage:** shiny green with yellow marginal stripes  **Texture:** medium to coarse
**Plant form:** upright-open to upright-arching
**Fall color:** yellow, Oct.
**Winter habit:** UPN, UPB  **Uses:** CF, PBmg, PBbg, SP, WA, NA, SC
**Special soil, site:** full sun; native to sandy soils, tolerates wet soil
**Comments:** attractive foliage, some fall color; good seashore plant; may become invasive in sandy soils because of creeping rhizomes; lower leaves may become brown early in the season.
### Additional Ornamental Grasses, Sedges, Rushes

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<th>Botanical name</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alopecurus pratensis ‘Aureus’</td>
<td>Yellow Foxtail</td>
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<td>Carex buchananii</td>
<td>Leatherleaf Sedge</td>
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<td>Cymbopogon citratus*</td>
<td>Lemon Grass</td>
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<td>Dactylis glomerata ‘Variegatus’</td>
<td>Cock’s-Foot Grass</td>
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<td>Wavy Hair Grass</td>
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<td>Melica altissima ‘Atropurpurea’</td>
<td>Purple Melic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Milium effusum ‘Aureum’</td>
<td>Millet Grass</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miscanthus floridulus</td>
<td>Giant Miscanthus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schizachyrium scoparium</td>
<td>Little Bluemern</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sesleria caerulea</td>
<td>Blue Moor Grass</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Setaria palmifolia ‘Variegata’*</td>
<td>Palm Grass</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stipa gigantea</td>
<td>Giant Feathergrass</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stipa pennata</td>
<td>Feathergrass</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zea mays ‘Variegata’</td>
<td>Ornamental Corn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zizania aquatica</td>
<td>Wild Rice</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: All plants are perennials except Zea mays ‘Variegata,’ which is annual.*

* Tender perennial.

### Grasses for Special Uses

#### WATER GARDENS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Botanical name</th>
<th>Common name</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Acorus gramineus ‘Variegatus’</td>
<td>Japanese Sweet Flag</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alopecurus pratensis ‘Aureus’</td>
<td>Yellow Foxtail</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arundo donax and A. d. ‘Versicolor’</td>
<td>Giant Reed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calamagrostis epigeous</td>
<td>Feather Reed Grass</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carex buchananii</td>
<td>Leatherleaf Sedge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carex morrowii ‘Expallida’</td>
<td>Japanese Sedge Grass</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deschampsia caespitosa</td>
<td>Tufted Hair Grass</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glyceria maxima ‘Variegata’</td>
<td>Variegated Mannagrass</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Panicum virgatum</td>
<td>Switch Grass</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miscanthus sinensis</td>
<td>Eulalia Grass</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miscanthus sinensis ‘Zebrinus’</td>
<td>Zebra Grass</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Molinia caerulea ‘Variegatus’</td>
<td>Purple Moor Grass</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spartina pectinata ‘Aureomarginata’</td>
<td>Cord Grass</td>
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#### SHADY LOCATIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Botanical name</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Calamagrostis epigeous</td>
<td>Feather Reed Grass</td>
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<tr>
<td>Carex pendula</td>
<td>Pendulous Sedge Grass</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carex spp.</td>
<td>Sedges</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chasmanthium latifolium</td>
<td>Northern Sea Oats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deschampsia caespitosa</td>
<td>Tufted Hair Grass</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Festuca gigantea</td>
<td>Giant Fescue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hystrix patula</td>
<td>Bottlebrush Grass</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luzula spp.</td>
<td>Woodrushes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Melica altissima ‘Atropurpurea’</td>
<td>Purple Melic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Milium effusum ‘Aureum’</td>
<td>Millet Grass</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Molinia caerulea ‘Variegata’</td>
<td>Purple Moor Grass</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stipa pennata</td>
<td>Feather Grass</td>
</tr>
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</table>

#### NATURALIZED AREAS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Botanical name</th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bouteloua gracilis</td>
<td>Side Oats Grama</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Briza media</td>
<td>Quaking Grass</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chasmanthium latifolium</td>
<td>Northern Sea Oats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deschampsia caespitosa</td>
<td>Tufted Hair Grass</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eragrostis curvula</td>
<td>Weeping Love Grass</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eragrostis trichodes</td>
<td>Sand Love Grass</td>
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<tr>
<td>Festuca gigantea</td>
<td>Giant Fescue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hystrix patula</td>
<td>Bottlebrush Grass</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luzula spp.</td>
<td>Woodrushes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miscanthus sacchariflorus</td>
<td>Eulalia Grass</td>
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<tr>
<td>Miscanthus sinensis</td>
<td>Eulalia Grass</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Panicum virgatum</td>
<td>Switch Grass</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phalaris canariensis</td>
<td>Canary Grass</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schizachyrium scoparium</td>
<td>Little Bluemern</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sorghastrum nutans</td>
<td>Indian Grass</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Grasses for Dried Arrangements

Many ornamental grasses have flowers that are excellent for use in dried arrangements. To dry the flowers, cut them as soon as they appear and hang them upside down (or upright in a container for curved stems) for 7 to 10 days in a cool, dry location that has good air circulation. The earlier the flowers are cut, the less chance they will shatter. Once they are dry, they can be used in arrangements, stored, or dyed.

Florists often sell grasses in natural and brightly dyed colors. The colors are achieved by dipping the dried flowers in a boiling water solution containing a strong chemical dye (clothing or aniline dye) and a mordant such as alum. Ornamental grasses look especially well when used in arrangements with other dried flowers such as strawflower, money plant, cattail, yarrow, and statice.

Almost all annual grasses have flowers suitable for dried arrangements. The following grasses are recommended for use in arrangements (A = annual, P = perennial).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Botanical name</th>
<th>Common name</th>
<th>Duration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agrostis nebulosa</td>
<td>Cloud Grass</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aira capillaris var. pulchella</td>
<td>Hair Grass</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ampelodesmos mauritianus</td>
<td>Mauritania</td>
<td>P</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apera interrupta</td>
<td>Dense Silky Bent Grass</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apera spica-venti</td>
<td>Loose Silky Bent Grass</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avena sterilis; A. fatua</td>
<td>Animated and Wild Oats</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bouteloua gracilis</td>
<td>Side Oats Grama</td>
<td>P</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Briza maxima</td>
<td>Large Quaking Grass</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Briza media</td>
<td>Quaking Grass</td>
<td>P</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Briza minor</td>
<td>Little Quaking Grass</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bromus macrostachys</td>
<td>Brome Grass</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bromus spp.</td>
<td>Brome Grass</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Desmazeria sicula</td>
<td>Spike Grass</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eragrostis trichodes</td>
<td>Sand Love Grass</td>
<td>P</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eragrostis spp.</td>
<td>Love Grass</td>
<td>A or P</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hordeum vulgare</td>
<td>Barley</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imperata brevifolia</td>
<td>Satin Tail</td>
<td>P</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lagurus ovatus</td>
<td>Hare’s-Tail Grass</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lamarkia aurea</td>
<td>Golden Top</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phalaris canariensis</td>
<td>Canary Grass</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phleum pratensis</td>
<td>Timothy</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Polypogon monspeliensis</td>
<td>Rabbit’s-Foot Grass</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rhynchosytrum repens</td>
<td>Ruby Grass</td>
<td>A or P</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Setaria italica</td>
<td>Foxtail Millet</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sitanion hystrich</td>
<td>Squirrel’s-Tail Grass</td>
<td>P</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stipa pennata, Stipa spp.</td>
<td>Feather Grass</td>
<td>P</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Triticum spp.</td>
<td>Wheat</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uniola paniculata</td>
<td>Sea Oats</td>
<td>P</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Culture and Maintenance

Ornamental grasses usually require minimal care throughout the growing season. The cultural practices vary depending on the plant’s duration, either annual (horticultural annuals are included here as well) or perennial.

Annual grasses are grown from seed each year. For earlier flowering, the plants can be started indoors, or the seed can be grown directly in the garden after the danger of frost is past. Spacing for most plants is 6 to 12 inches apart. Almost all annuals prefer full sun and require only adequate moisture and fertile soil for good growth.

Perennial grasses can be grown from seed, but are usually purchased as plants.Spacing for plants approximately 4 feet tall is 2 to 3 feet apart; larger plants require more spacing whereas shorter plants can be spaced about 1 foot apart. Most perennials prefer full sun or, in some cases, partial shade. Many of the perennial grasses are showiest in late fall. For this reason, it is desirable to carry out the cultural practices of division and cutting the plants back to the ground in early spring. The practice of cutting the plants back to within 6 inches from the ground is especially desirable for large, dense plants. Removing the previous year’s growth has the following advantages: (1) ensures vigorous growth, (2) acts as a pruning method for removal of dead stems, and (3) creates a more-attractive plant.

Division of perennials should occur about every 7 to 10 years (exception: Festuca ovina ‘Glaucus’, see description). Some species can grow in place for several years and actually look best when allowed to do so. All divisions should be made when the plants are dormant or just before they begin to grow in early spring. The need for division is determined by the appearance of the new growth in the spring. If a plant shows signs of growth only around the edges and not in the center, the middle of the plant is probably dead and the plant should be divided. Grasses that show uniform new growth can be left in place for a longer period of time.

The only cultural practice that may be necessary is staking the flowering stems of some of the larger plants. If the plants are grown in shady locations with very fertile soil, staking may be necessary.
Glossary and Key to Selected Types of Ornamental Grasses

A key to the identification of 41 types of ornamental grasses is given; many are illustrated and described in another section of the bulletin.

A key is a device used to identify unknown plants and is composed of couplets, which are two sentences with the same number, each of which is called a lead.

To use the key, begin with the first set of couplets, both numbered 1, and read both of these to decide which best describes the unknown plant in question. Select the most appropriate number 1 lead, and then read the next couplet of leads that immediately follows. For example, suppose you had a plant that had uniform green foliage; you would read both leads numbered 1 and accept the second number 1; then proceed to couplet 14 (see key) and choose the first or second lead numbered 14, whichever describes the plant in question; then proceed to numbers 15 and so forth. Always read both leads of the same number before selecting one or the other.

Eventually you will read a lead that correctly describes the unknown plant in question and ends with the plant name. If however, neither lead describes the plant, it is possible that the plant may not be in the key.

Terms and definitions are explained in the glossary preceding the key. The key is intended to be used in conjunction with the plant illustrations and descriptions given in the bulletin.

Glossary

Annual - completing one life cycle from seed to flowering in one growing season and then dying; usually propagated from seed.

Awn - slender hairlike projection(s) arising from the small flowers of grasses; variable in length and texture (see fig. 9, Hystrix patula).

Basal - pertaining to the base of the plant, at ground level; arising from or occurring at the base.

Bristle - slender hairlike projections arising from the petiole or branches of the inflorescence, sometimes surrounding the spikelet (see fig. 18, Pennisetum villosum).

Cespitose - forming tufts or mounds of foliage.

Corms - very short, thick, firm, fleshy stems, usually broader than high, just below ground or at ground level.

Fibrous roots - a root system in which the roots are finely divided, usually in a clump.

Glaucous - covered with a bluish or whitish substance that rubs off.

Horticultural annual - plants that are treated as annuals in cold climates, but are perennials in warmer regions.

Inflorescence - the total flowering structure and arrangement of individual flowers on the main stem (see fig. 10, Miscanthus sacchariflorus).

Ligule - the small membrane or ring of hairs that occurs on the upper side of the leaves, at the junction of the leaf blade and the sheath that wraps around the stem; reduced or absent in some species (see fig. 18, Pennisetum villosum).

Panicle - an open, often branched and spreading flowering structure; one type of inflorescence (see fig. 15, Panicum virgatum).

Papery bracts - a series of small, dry (papery) structures that surround or enclose the seed of almost all grasses (the spikelet).

Perennial - a plant that lives for an indefinite number of growing seasons; usually propagated from division, perhaps seed; may or may not flower the first growing season, but continues to grow and flower thereafter.

Rhizomes - underground stems (resembling roots), usually growing horizontally and rooting at the nodes.

Spike - a narrow and usually longer than wide inflorescence, the flowers borne along one main stem (see fig. 9, Hystrix patula).

Spikelet - the small flowering unit of grasses, consisting of a series of bracts placed one inside another, attached to a branch or the main flowering stem; there are many spikelets in one inflorescence (see fig. 15, Panicum virgatum).

Stolons - horizontal stems, usually prostrate or trailing at ground level, always above the ground, often rooting at the nodes.

Two-ranked - an alternate arrangement of leaves with the adjoining leaves on opposite sides of the stem, the third leaf directly above the first (see fig. 1, Arundo donax).
**Key to Forty-One Ornamental Grasses**

1. Plants with foliage striped with white or yellow, or uniformly blue, blue gray; not uniformly green.
   3. Plants 6"–10" tall.  
      *Festuca ovina* 'Glauc'a Blue Fescue

3. Plants 12"–30" tall.
   4. Leaves 1/8"–3/16" wide, mostly basal or on short stems; roots fibrous.  
      *Helictotrichon sempervirens* Blue Oat Grass

4. Leaves 1/2"–5/8" wide, basal or arising from a visible stem; rhizomes present.  
   *Elymus arenarius* Lyme Grass

2. Foliage with yellow or white stripes.
   5. Leaves with horizontal yellow bands.  
      *Miscanthus sinensis* 'Zebrinus' Zebra Grass

5. Leaves with longitudinal yellow or white stripes.
   6. Plants with fibrous root systems.
   7. Height of plants 3'–5'.  
      *Miscanthus sinensis* 'Variegatus' Striped Eulalia

7. Height of plants 20" or less.
   8. Leaves 3/16"–1/4" wide, arching, tapering at the end, curled, forming low dense mounds; often an indoor potted plant; rarely flowering, if so, on triangular stems.  
      *Carex morrowii* 'Expallida' Japanese Sedge Grass

8. Leaves 1/4"–3/8" wide, upright, if basal, not in curled mounds; grown outdoors; flowers common, on round stems.  
   *Molina caerulea* 'Variegata' Purple Moor Grass

6. Plants with rhizomes, stolons, or corms (bulbous basal structures).
   9. Leaf arrangement fan-shaped, arising directly from a visible rhizome (like a miniature iris); blades slender and with no midrib; indoor potted plant.  
      *Acorus gramineus* 'Variegatus' Japanese Sweet Flag

9. Leaf arrangement not fan-shaped, basal or along a stem; rhizome, if present, underground; blades with a midrib.
   10. Plants with 20"–36" long trailing stems (stolons); usually an indoor potted plant for hanging baskets.  
      *Opisium hirtellus* 'Variegatus' Basket Grass

10. Plants with upright stems or, if long trailing, with rhizomes, not stolons.
   11. Leaves 30" long or more.  
      *Spartina pectinata* 'Aurea-marginata' Cord Grass

11. Leaves rarely longer than 10".
   12. Plants with miniature corms at base of stem.  
      *Arhenatherum elatius* 'Variegatum' Bulbous Oat Grass

12. Plants with rhizomes.
   13. Leaves and stems essentially smooth, without hairs; plants 2'–5' tall.  
      *Phalaris arundinacea* 'Picta' Ribbon Grass

13. Leaves and stems soft and velvety, covered with short, soft hairs; plants 8"–20" tall.  
    *Holcus mollis* 'Variegatus' Velvet Grass
1 Plants with foliage uniformly green.

14 Plants with visible hard, teardrop seeds (beadlike), 1/4”-1/2” long, 1/4” wide; gray, white, or black.

Coix lacryma-jobi  Job’s Tears

14 Plants with small seeds, enclosed in papery bracts; not black, round, or beadlike.

15 Height of plants 4’ or more.

16 Leaves 1”-3” wide, conspicuously 2-ranked.

Arundo donax  Giant Reed

16 Leaves rarely wider than 1”, 2-ranked but not so conspicuous.

17 Soft, conspicuous hairs covering or surrounding the spikelet.

18 Inflorescence at least 20” long, often 2’-3’ long, open, and very showy.

Cortaderia selloana  Pampas Grass

18 Inflorescence rarely over 20” long, never 2’-3’ long.

19 Leaves 1/4” wide, midvein conspicuously white

Miscanthus sinensis ‘Gracillimus’  Maiden Grass

19 Leaves 1/2”-1” wide.

20 Ligule a small ring of hairs, 1/8” long or less; plants 5’-8’ tall; inflorescence with several slender branches, each 4’-8’ long.

21 Hairs on the inflorescence white or ivory, plants with rhizomes.

Miscanthus sacchariflorus  Eulalia Grass

21 Hairs on the inflorescence yellow or beige.

Miscanthus sinensis  Eulalia Grass

20 Ligule a dense ring of hairs, 1/4”-1/2” long; plants 8’-15’ tall; inflorescence on 1 main stem, 10”-20” long, becoming soft and dense with age.

Erianthus ravennae  Plume Grass

17 Soft conspicuous hairs absent; spikelets essentially smooth.

22 Inflorescence 20”-30” long.

Cortaderia selloana  Pampas Grass

22 Inflorescence less than 14” long.

23 Leaves 20”-40” long, less than 3/16” wide.

Eragrostis curvula  Weeping Love Grass

23 Leaves rarely over 18” long, 1/2” wide.

24 Inflorescence on 1 main stem, stiff, narrow and upright, in upright spikes.

Hystrix patula  Bottlebrush Grass

24 Inflorescence open, branched, nodding or spreading.

25 Spikelets very small, 1/8” long.

Panicum virgatum  Switch Grass

25 Spikelets 3/4”-1 1/4” long, conspicuously flattened.

Chasmanthium latifolium  Northern Sea Oats
15 Height of plants less than 4'.
26 Plants with dark green, leathery leaves, 1/4"-3/4+ wide, 20"-30" long, evergreen, with grooves or folds in the leaves.
   Carex pendula  Sedge Grass

26 Plants with medium-light-green leaves, rarely 3/4" wide, if so, never 20"-30" long; not evergreen or leathery.
27 Inflorescence open branched, secondary branches easily visible.
28 Flowers pink or ruby red, turning silvery white with age; spikelets covered with conspicuous soft hairs.
   Rhynchospermum repens  Ruby Grass

28 Flowers beige, green, or white; spikelets smooth or covered with very short hairs.
29 Plants 2' tall or less.
30 Inflorescence 4"-7" long, spikelets coarse, 1 1/2"-2" long, with awns 1/2"-1" long.
   Bromus macrostachys  Brome Grass

30 Inflorescence 2"-4" long, spikelets less than 3/4" long, awns minute or absent.
31 Spikelets less than 1/16" wide, inflorescence finely branched; plants very fine textured.
   Astra capillaris var. pulchella  Hair Grass

31 Spikelets 1/8"-3/8" wide, inflated, papery, and light; plants fine to medium textured.
32 Plants 18"-24" tall; spikelets 1/2"-3/4" long, nodding, and inflated.
   Briza maxima  Big Quaking Grass

32 Plants 8"-12" tall; spikelets 1/8" long or less, heart-shaped, upright, and spreading.
   Briza minor  Little Quaking Grass

29 Plants 2'-4' tall.
33 Plants annual, leaves dying after flowering is completed.
   Apera spica-venti  Loose Silky Bent Grass

33 Plants perennial, leaves green after flowering.
34 Inflorescence 3"-4" long.
   Briza media  Quaking Grass

34 Inflorescence 9"-20" long.
35 Ligule 1/4" long; inflorescence never wider than 6", fairly upright.
   Deschampsia caespitosa  Tufted Hair Grass

35 Ligule a ring of sparse hairs or absent; inflorescence 10"-12" wide at maturity, arching, nodding, rarely, if ever, upright.
   Eragrostis trichodes  Sand Love Grass
27 Inflorescence a spike or spike-like, along one main stem, secondary branches very small, if any; bristles or awns present or absent.

36 Spikes 1"-2" long, one-sided (like a comb), perpendicular to the main flowering stem.

*Bouteloua gracilis* Side Oats Grama

36 Spikes longer than 1"-2", or if 1"-2" long, the spikelets placed on all sides of the flowering stem.

37 Bristles, awns, or hairlike projections 3/4"-3" long present in the inflorescence.

38 Leaves 10" long.

39 Bristles 3"-4" long; total spike 2"-4" long, nodding, shining, and silky

*Hordeum jubatum* Squirrel's-Tail Grass

39 Bristles 3/4"-1 1/2" long; spikes 5"-18" long, stiff and upright.

*Hystrix patula* Bottlebrush Grass

38 Leaves 1"-3' long.

40 Inflorescence tawny, beige, or light green, 3"-5" long.

*Pennisetum villosum* Feather Top Grass

40 Inflorescence coppery tan, purple, or brown, 6"-12" long.

41 Leaves 1/8"-3/16" wide; spikes purple, 9"-12" long; annual in cold climates.

*Pennisetum setaceum* Crimson Fountain Grass

41 Leaves 1/4"-3/8" wide; spikes coppery tan or reedish brown, 6"-8" long; perennial.

*Pennisetum alopecuroides* Fountain Grass

37 Bristles or awns less than 1" long or absent; spikes very dense, soft, and compacted.

42 Leaves soft and velvety; inflorescence in soft, dense, woolly "heads," 1"-2" long, rarely longer, 3/4"-1" wide.

*Lagurus ovatus* Hare's-Tail Grass

42 Leaves smooth, not velvety; inflorescence soft, dense, 2"-6" long, 1/2"-3/4" wide.

*Polypogon monspeliensis* Rabbit's-Foot Grass
References

Books on Ornamental Grass

Other References

Suppliers

The following is a list of companies that sell ornamental grasses. No claim for completeness is intended since this is only a partial listing. It is given for convenience only and does not constitute an endorsement.

Seed
Geo. W. Park Seed Company  Thompson and Morgan
Greenwood, SC 29647-0001  PO Box 1308
(864) 223-8555  Jackson, NJ 08527
(908) 363-2225

Prairie Moon Nursery
Rte. 3, Box 163
Winona, MN 55987
(507) 452-1362

Plants
Kurt Bluemel, Inc.  Prairie Nursery
2740 Greene Lane  PO Box 306
Baldwin, MD 21013  Westfield, WI 53964
(410) 557-7229  (608) 296-3679

Carroll Gardens  Andre Viette Farm and Nursery
444 East Main St.  RD #1, Box 16
PO Box 310  Fisherville, VA 22939
Westminster, MD 21157  (703) 943-7315
(410) 876-7336

Limerock Ornamental  Wayside
Grasses  Hodges, SC 29695-0001
RD #1, Box 111-C  1 (800) 845-1124
Port Matilda, PA 16870  (814) 692-2272
Index

Acorus gramineus 'Variegatus' 2, 12
Agrostis nebulosa 13
Aira capillaris var. pulchella 13
Allopecurus pratensis 'Aureus' 12
Ampelodesmos mauritanicus 13
Apera interrupta 13
Apera spica-venti 13
Arrhenatherum elatius 'Variegatum' 2
Arundo donax 2
Arundo donax 'Versicolor' 12
Avena fatua 12
Avena sterilis 13
Bouteloua gracilis 12, 13
Briza maxima 13
Briza media 12, 13
Briza minor 13
Bromus macrostachys 13
Calamagrostis epigeous 2, 12
Carex buchananii 12
Carex morrowii ‘Expallida’ 3
Carex pendula 3
Chasmanthium latifolium 3, 12
Cox lacryma-jobi 3
Cortaderia selloana 4
Cymbopogon citratus 12
Dactylis glomerata 'Variegatus' 12
Deschampsia caespitosa 4, 12
Deschampsia flexuosa 12
Desmazaeria cicula 13
Elymus arenarius 4
Elymus glaucus 4
Elymus interruptus 12
Eragrostis curvula 5
Eragrostis trichodes 13
Erianthus ravennae 5
Festuca amethystina 5
Festuca gigantea 12
Festuca ovina var. durieuscula 6
Festuca ovina ‘Glaucum’ 6
Glyceria maxima ‘Variegata’ 12
Hakonechloa macra ‘Albo-aurea’ 12
Helictotrichon sempervirens 6
Holcus mollis ‘Variegatus’ 6
Hordeum jubatum 7
Hordeum vulgare 13
Hystrix patula 7
Imperata brevifolia 13
Imperata cylindrica ‘Rubra’ 12
Koeleria glauca 12
Lagurus ovatus 13
Lamarkia aerea 13
Luzula nivea 12
Luzula sylvatica 12
Melica altissima ‘Atropurpurea’ 12
Milius effusum ‘Aureum’ 12
Miscanthus floridulus 12
Miscanthus sacchariflorus 7
Miscanthus sinensis 7, 12
Miscanthus sinensis ‘Gracillimus’ 8
Miscanthus sinensis ‘Purpurascens’ 9
Miscanthus sinensis ‘Silver Feather’ 9
Miscanthus sinensis ‘Stricta’ 9
Miscanthus sinensis ‘Variegatus’ 8
Miscanthus sinensis ‘Zebrinus’ 9
Molinae caerulea ‘Variegata’ 9
Opismenus hirtellus ‘Variegatus’ 9
Panicum virgatum 10
Panicum virgatum ‘Rubrum’ 10
Panicum virgatum ‘Strictum’ 10
Pennisetum alopecuroides 10
Pennisetum alopecuroides ‘Hamein’ 10
Pennisetum ruppelli 10
Pennisetum setaceum 10
Pennisetum villosum 11
Phalaris arundinacea ‘Picta’ 11
Phalaris canariensis 13
Phleum pratensium 13
Polypogon monspeliensis 13
Rhynchelytrum repens 11
Schizachyrium scoparium 12
Sesleria caerulea 12
Setaria italicica 13
Setaria palmifolia ‘Variegata’ 13
Sitanion hystrix 13
Sorgastrum nutans 12
Spartina pectinata ‘Aureo-marginata’ 11
Stipa gigantea 12
Stipa pennata 12
Triticum spp. 13
Uniola latifolia 3
Uniola paniculata 13
Zea mays ‘Variegata’ 12
Zizania aquatica 12