

SPRIT OF GARDENING

Ornamental Grasses

ORNAMENTAL GRASSES

Ornamental grasses are a large group of plants that are becoming an essential element in landscape designs. They make dramatic impacts on landscapes, as well as add multi-season interest.

They have the versatility and adaptability to grow in any landscape. They can be used as specimens, en masse, in groups, as a hedge or screen, as borders, scattered throughout beds and in containers. They have different shapes which can be used in various settings. A vase-shaped grass would make a striking addition to any formal landscape. A tall upright grass would make a great screen, while a short mounding grass makes a suitable border.

The varying textures of grasses can create different themes. A fine textured grass might have a very graceful, elegant habit which would soften a planting. A stiff upright grass makes a great focal point or specimen. A loose form lends itself to a cottage garden.

Grasses add colour to landscapes. The most common colour of ornamental grass is green but there are blue, golden, red, bronze, black, purple, orange, silver and striped (vertically & horizontally) varieties. When grasses bloom their flower and seed heads also add a splash of colour.

Grasses are especially valuable in fall and winter. Dramatic seed heads and fall colour are welcome

additions when most perennials are being cut down. Some grasses will hold their shape in the winter. Even with snow on the ground, this can add interest to what can often be very dismal landscapes.

By examining light and movement you can creatively enhance areas with the addition of a grass. Grasses have translucence to them. Depending on the time of day or year, the light will catch the leaf blades and flower heads differently, adding vibrancy to the landscape. Grasses tend to be lightweight and therefore move with winds.

Ornamental grasses are very adaptable. Different types of grass have different requirements so finding a culturally compatible grass should not be difficult. There are two different classifications for grasses - cool season and warm season.

Cool season grasses begin growing in early spring, flower in spring and summer, and then growth slows or stops in the hot summer weather. Many cool season grasses are evergreen requiring trimming or raking out rather than cutting back.

Warm season grasses begin their growth when temperatures begin to warm up in the spring, flower and set seed in summer and fall, and then become dormant with the onset of winter. Many warm-season grasses have fall colour. They will require cutting back in the early spring.

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Name	Cool/Warm Season	Clump Forming
Alopecurus - Foxtail Grass	cool	yes
Arrhenatherum - Bulbous Oat Grass	cool	yes
Briza - Quaking Grass	cool	yes
Calamagrostis - Reed Grass	cool	yes
Carex – Sedge	not a true grass	yes
Chasmanthium – Northern Sea Oats	warm	no
Deschampsia - Hair Grass	cool	yes
Festuca - Blue Fescue	cool	yes
Hakonechloa – Hakone Grass	warm	no
Helictotrichon - Blue Oat Grass	cool	yes
Imperata - Blood Grass	warm	no
Juncus - Spiral Rush	not a true grass	no
Koeleria - June Grass	cool	yes
Luzula - Wood Rush	not a true grass	yes
Milium – Millet	cool	no
Miscanthus - Maiden Grass	warm	yes
Molinia - Moor Grass	warm	yes
Panicum - Switch Grass	warm	yes
Pennisetum – Fountain Grass	warm	yes
Phalaris - Ribbon Grass	cool	no

Grasses tolerant of wet soils		
Hair Grass	Maiden Grass	Moor Grass
Northern Sea Oats	Ribbon Grass	Sedge
Spiral Rush		
Switch Grass		
Variegated Grasses		
Blood Grass	Bulbous Oat Grass	Feather Reed Grass
Foxtail Grass	Hakone Grass	Maiden Grass
Moor Grass	Ribbon Grass	Sedge
Spiral Rush	Wood Rush	
Tall Grasses – 3 feet or more		
Blue Oat Grass	Feather Reed Grass	Hair Grass
Karl Foerster Grass	Maiden Grass	Moor Grass
Northern Sea Oats	Ribbon Grass	Switch Grass
Drought Tolerant Grasses		
Blue Fescue	Blue Oat Grass	Bulbous Oat Grass
Feather Reed Grass	June Grass	Quaking Grass
Switch Grass		
Blue leaved Grasses		
Blue Fescue	Blue Oat Grass	June Grass
Switch Grass		
Grasses with good winter interest		
Blue Fescue	Blue Oat Grass	Feather Reed Grass
Feather Grass	Maiden Grass	Northern Sea Oats
Spiral Rush	Switch Grass	Wood Rush

Grasses with showy seed heads		
Feather Grass	Feather Reed Grass	Fountain Grass
Hair Grass	Maiden Grass	Moor Grass
Mosquito grass	Northern Sea Oats	Quaking Grass
Sedge	Switch Grass	