



Ornamental Grasses

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Ornamental grasses are increasing in popularity as gardeners look for lower care, higher impact plants. They usually require less care throughout the growing season. Grasses traditionally used for lawns require frequent mowing, watering, and pest control. Ornamental grasses are allowed to grow to their normal size and shape. They range in height from 6 inches to 14 feet. They are grown for their attractive foliage, texture, color, distinctive plant form, or for showy flowers or seeds which make landscape accents for dried arrangements.

Of the hundreds of species of grasses some 70 are grown as ornamental in our area. Most are winter hardy but some are tender perennials that are grown as annuals in this area.

Grasses can be used as groundcovers or specimen plants and grow well around ponds, streams, perennial borders, rock gardens, or naturalized areas. They require few if any pest control. Annual grasses are grown from seed each year and can be started indoors or the seed can be sown directly into the garden. Our growing season makes it advantageous to get a longer show of beauty by starting them as transplants. All annual grasses prefer full sun and require adequate moisture and fertility for good growth. Perennial grasses are usually purchased as plants and prefer full sun although some tolerate partial shade.

Spacing is important. Plant shorter grasses one foot apart. Plants four feet tall need to be planted two to three feet apart. Place larger plants even further apart or they will lose their attractive form.

Most grasses are most attractive in the late fall. Cut them back each spring to remove dead stems and create vigorous growth. Perennial grasses are long lived and don't require frequent divisions. Divide plants that show growth around the edges and not in the center. Make the divisions in late winter or early spring while the plants are still dormant. Those with uniform new growth, can be left in place for a longer period of time. Grasses grown in partial shade or in very fertile locations may require staking. When selecting ornamental grasses, choose varieties carefully as some may have invasive root systems or produce seeds that become weeds in the garden. Some also produce pollen that aggravates allergies. Careful attention to the size, form, and variety avoids problems and create new and exciting dimensions in landscape plants.

If the only grass you have ever grown is turfgrass that requires mowing, watering, irrigation, and constant attention, expand your garden horizons. Ornamental grasses can help.

NAME (common and scientific)	HEIGHT	GROWTH	PLANT FORM	TEXTURE	COMMENTS
Bulbous Oat Grass <i>Arrhenatherum elatius</i> ' <i>Variegatum</i> '	18"-25"	perennial	upright, open	fine to medium	Likes cool temperature. Tolerates poor soil. Cut back midsummer.
Giant Reed Grass <i>Arundo donax</i>	18'	Perennial	Upright, spreading	Coarse	Spreads in saline and alkaline soils if water is available
Feather Reed Grass <i>Calamagrostis epigeous</i>	3'-6'	perennial	upright, narrow	medium	Tolerates many growing conditions. May spread by rhizomes in sandy soils.
Sedge Grass <i>Carex pendula</i>	2'-3½'	perennial	mound to upright	medium	Attractive, dark green foliage. Slow growing.
Northern Sea Oats; Spangle Grass <i>Chasmanthium latifolium</i>	3'-5'	perennial	upright, narrow	medium	Difficult to grow from seed. Attractive seeds fall and winter.
Job's Tears <i>Coix lacryma-jobi</i>	3'-4'	annual	upright, open to narrow	coarse	Unique beadlike seeds can be used for necklaces. Tolerates excessive moisture but may become

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					unattractive.
Pampas Grass <i>Cotaderia selloana</i>	3'-20'	annual	upright, open	fine to medium	Not always grown in our area because of a short growing season.
Tufted Hair Grass <i>Deschampsia</i>	20"-36"	perennial	mound	fine to medium	Long flowering period. May open up by late summer.
Blue Lyme Grass <i>Elymus arenarius</i>	20-25"	perennial	low, open, spreading	coarse	Light blue foliage, loses color with frost. Spreads by rhizomes and is invasive.
Weeping Love Grass <i>Eragrostis curvula</i>	3'-5'	perennial	upright, open to arching	fine	Self seeds liberally. Can be flattened by heavy winds and rains.
Plume Grass, Ravennae Grass <i>Erianthus ravennae</i>	7'-15'	perennial	upright, open	coarse	Easy to grow with attractive seeds. Flowers limited by spring frost.
Large Blue Fescue <i>Festuca amethystina</i>	1½'-3'	perennial	tufted	fine	Needs full sun, good drainage. Blue foliage.
Blue Fescue <i>Festuca ovina</i> 'Glaucua'	6"-12"	perennial	tufted clump	fine	Many varieties. Blue foliage remains evergreen. Tolerates partial shade.
Blue Oat Grass <i>Helictotrichon sempervirens</i>	2'-3'	perennial	tufted clump	fine to medium	Attractive foliage and form. Does not do well with excess moisture or shade.
Velvet Grass <i>Holcus mollis</i> 'Variegatus'	4"-12"	perennial	low, open, spreading	fine to medium	May become invasive because of rhizomes. Attractive striped foliage.
Bottlebrush Grass <i>Hystrix patula</i>	2'-4'	perennial	upright, open	medium	Partial shade, numerous seed heads.
Eulalia Grass <i>Miscanthus sacchariflorus</i>	5'-10'	perennial	upright, open to narrow	medium to coarse	Becomes invasive in moist areas.
Eulalia Grass <i>Eulalia japonica</i>	7'-13'	perennial	upright, open	medium	Attractive seedheads. May need staking in shade or with high fertility.
Maiden Grass <i>Miscanthus sinensis</i> 'Gracillimus'	3'-6'	perennial	upright arching	fine	Pink seedheads, long arching leaves. Flowers limited by fall frost.
Zebra Grass <i>Mixcanthus sinensis</i> 'Zebrinus'	4'-7'	perennial	upright, open to narrow	medium	Attractive throughout the growing season. Low growing.
Purple Moor Grass <i>Molinia caerulea</i> 'Variegata'	1'-2'	perennial	upright arching	fine	Reseeds itself and may be slightly weedy, good for wildlife.
Switch Grass <i>Panicum virgatum</i>	3'-6'	perennial	upright, narrow	medium	Showy fall color, tolerates light shade.
Fountain Grass <i>Pennisetum alopecuroides</i>	4'-4½'	perennial	mound	medium-fine	Widely used, attractive seeds. Won't survive frost.
Crimson Fountain Grass <i>Pennisetum setaceum</i> (p. <i>ruppelii</i>)	2'-3'	annual	upright arching	fine	Tolerates poor soil. May become invasive.
Feather Top <i>Pennisetum</i>	18"-30"	annual	mound to irregular	medium	Dies with first frost. Widely sold as a bedding plant.
Ribbon Grass <i>Phalaris arundinacea</i> 'Picta'	2'-4½'	perennial	upright open	medium	Tolerates poor soil. May become invasive.
Cord Grass <i>Spartina pectinata</i> 'Aureo-marginata'	4'-8'	perennial	upright open to arching	medium to coarse	May become invasive. Tolerates some salt and wet areas.

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