ORNAMENTAL GRASSES

LARRY A. SAGERS
UTAH STATE UNIVERSITY EXTENSION
HORTICULTURE SPECIALIST
THANKSGIVING POINT GARDENS
ORNAMENTAL GRASSES

Advanced Master Gardeners

2008
Ornamental grasses are increasingly popular as lower care, higher impact plants.
Traditional grasses require frequent mowing, watering, and pest control.
Ornamental grasses require less care through the season and need little pest control.
If the only grass you have ever grown is turfgrass that requires mowing, watering, irrigation, and constant attention, expand your garden horizons.
Ornamental Grasses

- Use these plants for:
  - Attractive foliage
  - Texture
  - Color
  - Distinctive plant forms
  - Showy flowers or seeds
Ornamental Grasses

- Use the plants for
- Landscape accents
- Dried arrangements
- Landscape screens
- Specimen plants
- Water wise designs
Ornamental Grasses

• Use ornamental grasses as:
  • Groundcovers
  • Around ponds or streams
  • Perennial borders
  • Rock gardens
  • Naturalized areas
Allow ornamental grasses to grow to their normal size and shape.
These plants range in height from 6 inches to more than 14 feet.
Of the hundreds of species of grasses some 70 grow as ornamentals in our area.
Grass Anatomy

- **Grass Plant**
  - Inflorescence
  - Flowering Culm
  - Ligule
  - Leaf Blade
  - Leaf Sheath
  - Auricles
  - Collar
  - Tiller (Senescing Stolon)
  - Stolon Daughter
  - Rhizome Daughter
  - Rhizome
  - Adventitious Roots
  - Mesocotyl
  - Seed
  - Seminal Roots
Grass Anatomy

GROWTH HABIT

RHIZOMATOUS

BUNCH-TYPE

STOLONIFEROUS
Most are winter hardy but some are tender perennial grasses that grow as annuals in this area.
Annual grasses grow from seed each year. Start seeds indoors or direct sow them in the garden.
Start them as transplants to get a longer show of beauty in our growing season.
Annual grasses need full sun, moisture and good fertility
Annual Grasses for Utah
Crimson Fountain Grass

*Pennisetum setaceum* (p. ruppelii)

- Height: 2'-3'
- Type: annual
- Form: upright arching
- Texture: fine
- Notes: Tolerates poor soil. May become invasive
Crimson Fountain Grass
*Pennisetum setaceum* (*p. ruppelii*)
Feather Top

_Pennisetum_

- Height: 18"-30"
- Type: annual
- Form: mound to irregular
- Texture: medium
- Notes: Dies with first frost. Widely sold as a bedding plant
Feather Top
_Pennisetum_
Oriental fountain grass
*Pennisetum orientale*

- Height: 1’-2’
- Early blooming; grow as annual in cold climates
- Zones 7-9
Oriental fountain grass
Pennisetum orientale
Pennisetum alopecuroides
‘Moudry’

- Height: 2-3’
- Unusual black or purple flowers
- Invasive in mild climates
- Shade Tolerant
- Zone: 7-9
Pennisetum alopecuroides

‘Moudry’
Lemon Grass
*Cymbopogon citratus*

- **Height:** 2’-3’
- **Type:** tender perennial
- **Form:** clumping, arching
- **Texture:** medium
- **Notes:** wonderful fragrance plant next to walkway, use in cooking
Lemon Grass
*Cymbopogon citratus*
Papyrus
Purple Millet

- Height: 2’-3’
- Type: tender perennial
- Form: clumping, large seed heads
- Texture: coarse
- Notes: All American Selection winner
Purple Millet
Perennial Grasses for Utah
Buy perennial grasses as plants
Perennial grasses are long lived and do not require frequent divisions
Most perennial species prefer full sun although some tolerate partial shade.
Grasses are most attractive in the late fall.
Divide plants that show growth around the edges and not in the center.
Make divisions in late winter or early spring on dormant plants.
Those with uniform new growth do not need dividing.
Grasses in partial shade or very fertile locations may require staking.
Many perennial grasses beautify local landscapes
Giant Reed Grass

*Arundo donax*

- Height: 9’-18’
- Type: perennial
- Form: upright
- Texture: medium
- Notes: Often called bamboo
Giant Reed Grass

*Arundo donax*
Feather Reed Grass

*Calamagrostis epigeous*

- Height: 3'-6'
- Type: perennial
- Form: upright, narrow
- Texture: medium
- Notes: Tolerates many growing conditions. May spread by rhizomes in sandy soils
Feather Reed Grass
*Calamagrostis epigeous*
Northern Sea Oats; Spangle Grass
*Chasmanthium latifolium*

- Height: 3'-5'
- Type: perennial
- Form: upright, narrow
- Texture: medium
- Notes: Difficult to grow from seed. Attractive seeds fall and winter
Northern Sea Oats; Spangle Grass
Chasmanthium latifolium
Pampas Grass
*Cotaderia selloana*

- Height: 3'-20'
- Type: annual
- Form: upright, open
- Texture: fine to medium
- Notes: Not always hardy in Northern Utah because of a short growing season
Pampas Grass
*Cotaderia selloanaa*
Pampas Grass
*Cotaderia selloana*
Tufted Hair Grass

Deschampsia

• Height: 20"-36"
• Type: perennial
• Form: mound
• Texture: fine to medium
• Notes: Long flowering period. May open up by late summer
Tufted Hair Grass

Deschampsia
Plume Grass, Ravennae Grass
*Erianthus ravennae*

- **Height:** 7'-15'
- **Type:** perennial
- **Form:** upright, open
- **Texture:** coarse
- **Notes:** Easy to grow with attractive seeds. Flowers limited by spring frost.
Plume Grass, Ravennae Grass

*Erianthus ravennae*
Blue Lyme Grass

*Elymus arenarius*

- **Height:** 20-25"
- **Type:** perennial
- **Form:** low, open, spreading
- **Texture:** Light blue foliage, loses color with frost
- **Notes:** Spreads by rhizomes and is invasive
Blue Lyme Grass

*Elymus arenarius*
Horsetail Fern

*Equisetum hyemale*

- Height: 1’-2’
- Type: perennial
- Form: spreading
- Texture: coarse
- Notes: jointed stems
- Invades wet areas
Horsetail Fern

*Equisetum hyemale*
Blue Fescue

*Festuca ovina `Glauc'a*

- Height: 6"-12"
- Type: perennial
- Form: tufted clump
- Texture: fine
- Notes: Many varieties. Blue foliage remains evergreen. Tolerates partial shade
Blue Fescue

*Festuca ovina `Glauc'a*
Japanese Blood Grass

*Imperata cylindrica* ‘Red Baron’

- Height: 12-18 inches
- Type: perennial
- Form: spreading, upright
- Texture: medium
- Notes: moist but well drained soil
Japanese Blood Grass
Maiden Grass

*Miscanthus sinensis*

- Height: 3'-6'
- Type: perennial
- Form: upright arching
- Texture: fine
- Notes: many different cultivars
Maiden Grass

*Miscanthus sinensis `Gracillimus`

- Height: 3'-6'
- Type: perennial
- Form: upright arching
- Texture: fine
- Notes: Pink seedheads, long arching leaves. Flowers limited by fall frost
Maiden Grass
*Miscanthus sinensis `Gracillimus'"
Zebra Grass

*Miscanthus sinensis `Zebrinus'*

- Height: 4'-7'
- Type: perennial
- Form: upright, open to narrow
- Texture: medium
- Notes: Attractive throughout the growing season but slow growing
Zebra Grass
*Miscanthus sinensis 'Zebrinus'*. 
Other Natives
Indian Rice Grass
*Orizopsis hymenoides*
Other Natives
Indian Rice Grass
*Orizopsis hymenoides*
‘Autumn Light’

*Miscanthus sinensis* ‘Autumn Light’

- Height: 4’-6’
- Type: perennial
- Form: clumping, upright, divergent
- Texture: medium
- Notes:
‘Autumn Light’

*Miscanthus sinensis* ‘Autumn Light’
Miscanthus sinensis

‘Morning Lights’
Miscanthus sinensis
‘Purpurascens’
Miscanthus sinensis
‘Jim Dwarf’
Fountain Grass

*Pennisetum alopecuroides*

- Height: 2'-4'
- Type: perennial
- Form: mound
- Texture: fine
- Notes: Widely used, attractive seeds. Won't survive frost
Fountain Grass

Pennisetum alopecuroides ‘Mouldry’
Fountain Grass

_Pennisetum alopecuroides_
Dwarf Fountain Grass
*Pennisetum alopecuroides*
‘Little Bunny’

- Height: 8-12 inches
- Type: perennial
- Form: clumping, upright, divergent
- Texture: fine
- Notes: great in rock gardens, fresh and dried arrangements
Dwarf Fountain Grass

*Pennisetum alopecuroides* ‘Little Bunny’ Grass
Dwarf Fountain Grass

*Pennisetum alopecuroides*

‘Hameln’

- Height: 1’-2’
- Type: perennial
- Form: clumping, upright, divergent
- Texture: fine
- Notes: great around ponds, in rock gardens, borders and as a transitional plant from formal to informal beds
Dwarf Fountain Grass
*Pennisetum alopecuroides*
‘Hameln’
Ribbon Grass

*Phalaris arundinacea `Picta'*

- Height: 2'-4'
- Type: perennial
- Form: upright open
- Texture: medium
- Notes: Tolerates poor soil. May become invasive
Ribbon Grass

*Phalaris arundinacea `Picta'*
Switch Grass

*Panicum virgatum*

- Height: 3'-6'
- Type: perennial
- Form: upright, narrow
- Texture: medium
- Notes: Showy fall color, tolerates light shade
Switch Grass

Panicum virgatum
Switch Grass

*Panicum virgatum* ‘Heavy Metal’

- Height: 3’-5’
- Type: perennial
- Form: clumping, upright
- Texture: fine-medium
- Notes: grows in a straight column, maintains form in winter
Switch Grass

Panicum virgatum ‘Heavy Metal’
Switch Grass
*Panicum virgatum* ‘Dallas Blues’
Little Bluestem Grass
*Schizachyrium scoparium*

- Height: 2’-3’
- Type: perennial
- Form: erect clumps
- Texture: medium
- Notes: burnished orange fall color
Little Bluestem Grass
Schizachyrium scoparium
Indian Grass
*Sorghastrum nutans*

- Height: 3’-8’
- Type: perennial
- Form: tall narrow clumps
- Texture: medium
- Notes: flower heads used in fresh or dried arrangements
Indian Grass
*Sorghastrum nutans*
Big bluestem
Andropogon gerardii

- Height: 4’-8’
- Type: perennial
- Form: willowy
- Texture: medium
- Notes: distinctive 3-angled flower looks like a turkey foot
Big bluestem
Andropogon gerardii
Japanese Forest Grass

**Hakonechloa macra ‘Aureola’**

- Height: 8-12 inches
- Type: perennial
- Form: slow spreading
- Texture: medium
- Notes: shade
Japanese Forest Grass
Hakonechloa macra ‘Aureola’
Feather Grass

*Stipa tenuissimia*

- Height: 1’-3’
- Type: perennial
- Form: clumping
- Texture: fine
- Notes: specimen plant
Feather Grass
Stipa tenuissimia
Yellow Groove Bamboo
*Phyllostachys aureosulcata*

- Height: 20’-25’
- Type: tender perennial
- Form: spreading, upright
- Texture: coarse
- Notes
Yellow Groove Bamboo
*Phyllostachys aureosulcata*
Black Bamboo
Black Bamboo
Bamboo
Bamboo (yellow-twig)
**Sedge Grass** *Carex pendula*

- **Height:** 2'-3½'
- **Type:** perennial
- **Form:** mound to upright
- **Texture:** medium
- **Notes:** Attractive, dark green foliage. Slow growing
Sedge Grass
Carex pendula
Great Basin Wild Rye

*Elymus cinereus*

- Height: 4-5”
- Type: Perennial
- Form: Bunch
- Texture: Coarse
- Notes: One of the best for low water landscapes. Browns out in summer without water.
Great Basin Wild Rye
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
Use Grasses in the Landscape

– To add fall interest when other flowers have faded.
Use Grasses in the Landscape

• To stabilize soil and prevent erosion.
Use Grasses In The Landscape

• To add neutral colors to flower beds and borders
Use Grasses In The Landscape

• To screen an unsightly view
Use Grasses in the Landscape

• To add winter interest..
Use Grasses in the Landscape

- To add texture and height to flower beds and borders.
Spacing is important so plant shorter grasses one foot apart.
Plants varieties that grow four feet tall, two to three feet apart. Place larger plants even further apart or they will lose their attractive form.
Cut them back each spring to remove dead stems and stimulate vigorous growth
Grasses grow back faster when they are burned back.
Burning favors grasses not woody plants
Grasses burn very hot and fast and may damage other plants.
Never Attempt This In Your Garden
Trimming Ornamental Grasses
Spacing is important so plant shorter grasses one foot apart.
Plants varieties that grow four feet tall, two to three feet apart.
Plant larger types further apart to keep their attractive form.
Cut them back each spring to remove dead stems and stimulate vigorous growth.
Grasses grow back faster when they are burned back.
Burning favors grasses not woody plants
Grasses burn very hot and fast and may damage other plants.
Grass

- Height:
- Type:
- Form:
- Texture:
- Notes:
Grass

- Height:
- Type:
- Form:
- Texture:
- Notes:
Eulalia Grass

*Miscanthus saccahariflorus*

- Height: 5'-10'
- Type: perennial
- Form: upright, open to narrow
- Texture: medium to coarse
- Notes: Becomes invasive in moist areas
Job's Tears

Coix lacryma-jobi

- Height: 3'-4'
- Type: annual
- Form: upright, open to narrow
- Texture: coarse
- Notes: Unique beadlike seeds are used for necklaces. Tolerates excessive moisture but may become unattractive
Bulbous Oat Grass
*Arrhenatherum elatius `Variegatum'*

- Height: 18"-25"
- Type: perennial
- Form: upright, open
- Texture: fine to medium
- Notes: Likes cool temperature. Tolerates poor soil. Cut back midsummer
Weeping Love Grass

*Eragrostis curvula*

- **Height:** 3'-5'
- **Type:** perennial
- **Form:** upright, open to arching
- **Texture:** fine
- **Notes:** seeds liberally. Can be flattened by heavy winds and rains
Large Blue Fescue
*Festuca amethystina*

- Height: 10”-36”
- Type: perennial
- Form: tufted
- Texture: fine
- Notes: Needs full sun, good drainage. Blue foliage
Blue Oat Grass

*Helictotrichon sempervirens*

- Height: 2'-3'
- Type: perennial
- Form: tufted clump
- Texture: fine to medium
- Notes: Attractive foliage and form. Does not do well with excess moisture or shade
Velvet Grass

*Holcus mollis `Variegatus`

- Height: 4"-12"
- Type: perennial
- Form: low, open, spreading
- Texture: fine to medium
- Notes: May become invasive because of rhizomes. Attractive stripped foliage
Bottlebrush Grass

*Hystrix patula*

- Height: 2'-4'
- Type: perennial
- Form: upright, open
- Texture: medium
- Notes: Partial shade, numerous seed heads
Eulalia Grass

_Eulalia japonica_

- **Height:** 7'-13'
- **Type:** perennial
- **Form:** upright, open
- **Texture:** medium
- **Notes:** Attractive seedheads. May need staking in shade or with high fertility
Purple Moor Grass
*Molinea caerulea `Variegata`

- Height: 1'-2'
- Type: perennial
- Form: upright arching
- Texture: fine
- Notes: Reseeds itself and may be slightly weedy, good for wildlife
Cord Grass
*Spartina pectinata* `Aureomarginata`

- Height: 4'-8'
- Type: perennial
- Form: upright open to arching
- Texture: medium to coarse
- Notes: May become invasive. Tolerates some salt and wet areas
Purple Moor Grass
*Molinea caerulea `Variegata'

- Height: 1'-2'
- Type: perennial
- Form: upright arching
- Texture: fine
- Notes: Reseeds itself and may be slightly weedy, good for wildlife
Indian Grass
Sorgastrum avenaceum

• Height: 4’-6’
• Type: perennial
• Form: clumping, upright
• Texture: fine-medium
• Notes: vertical accent, border or mass planting
Hakonechloa macra ‘Albovariegata’

White Striped Hakone Grass
Quaking Grass
Briza media

• Height: 2’-3’
• Type: perennial
• Form: small clump
• Texture: fine
• Notes: dainty see-through flowers, great for mass or meadow planting
Horsetail Fern
Equisetum hyemale

• Height: 1’-2’
• Type: perennial
• Form: spreading
• Texture: coarse
• Notes: jointed stems
Japanese Blood Grass

*Imperata cylindrica ‘Red Baron’*

- **Height:** 12-18 inches
- **Type:** perennial
- **Form:** spreading, upright
- **Texture:** medium
- **Notes:** moist but well drained soil
‘Evergold’ Japanese Sedge
Carex hachioensis ‘Evergold’

- Height: 6’-8’
- Type: perennial
- Form: clumping, arching
- Texture: medium
- Notes:
Blue Switch Grass
Panicum virgatum ‘Strictum’

• Height: 4’-5’
• Type: perennial
• Form: clumping, upright
• Texture: fine-medium
• Notes:
Blue Switch Grass
Panicum virgatum ‘Strictum’
Switch Grass

*Panicum virgatum* ‘Heavy Metal’
Grass

- Height:
- Type:
- Form:
- Texture:
- Notes:
Other Natives
Blue Gramma
Grass

- Height:
- Type:
- Form:
- Texture:
- Notes:
Other Natives
Blue Gramma
Panicum virgatum
‘Rotstrahlbusch’
Panic Raide Switchgrass

- Height: 3-7’
- Good fall color
- Tolerates wet or dry site
- Zone 5-9
Panicum vergatum
Panic Raide Switchgrass
The End