

Ornamental Grasses

Ornamental grasses come in all shapes and sizes, various textures, and a wide range of colors. They are spectacular when planted as a specimen or in groups. Grasses provide a natural, low maintenance look, and work well as a screen or backdrop for smaller shrubs or perennials. They are pest- and disease-resistant, hardy, and require little care, making them a wonderful choice for any home garden.

Planting:

Dig hole twice as wide as the container and deep enough so that when planted, the top of the root ball will be 1"-2" above the surrounding soil level. Create mixture of 1/3 topsoil and 2/3 Stauffers Premium Planting Mix. Remove grass from container and score vertically down the root ball 4 or 5 times, about 1" deep. Loosen circling, matted roots so they will grow into the surrounding soil mix and set grass in the hole. Backfill the hole with the soil mixture and tamp down to hold the grass in place. Make sure that the grass is 1"-2" about the surrounding soil when planting is complete. Water thoroughly, to settle soil and remove air pockets. A layer of mulch about 1"-2" deep will help to retain moisture and keep weeds to a minimum.

Grasses will do best in full sun, however there are a few varieties which can tolerate a more shaded location. These will be noted below. Spacing is important for ornamental grasses, and a simple rule of thumb when planting is to space as far apart as they will grow tall.

There are many different genera (groups) of grasses, and hundreds of species and varieties. Each group usually displays similar growth characteristics and habits, with different colors, heights, or sizes within that group. The following is a general overview of the different categories and some of the most common varieties within each group.

Feather Reed Grasses - *Calamagrostis*

Feather reed grasses have a narrow, compact habit. The foliage of the grass grows to a height of 2'-3'. Skinny plumes emerge and grow to height of approximately 4'-5' in mid-summer, earlier than most other grasses. These plumes fade to a golden-wheat color and sway in the breeze as a beautiful fall showpiece.

'Avalanche' - Variegated foliage, plumes are silvery green, turning to bronze

'Karl Foerster' - Green foliage, pushes growth earlier than other grasses in the spring

'Overdam' - Narrow, variegated foliage to 30", with a plume to 5'-6' in fall

Pampas Grass - *Cortaderia sellona*

Pampas grasses are the showiest of all the grasses. The plumes are huge, silver-white clusters that are second to none in the late summer. Foliage often grows to 8'-10' in height, with the white plumes reaching an even higher 12' or more. These are large grasses that need a lot of room to grow and spread. Pampas grasses also require extra care over the winter. They should be mulched heavily in late fall in order to insulate the roots during the cold winter months.

'Andes Silver' - Dwarf form, reaches 5'-7', more compact, plumes are more silver than white

'Pumila' - Dwarf form, foliage grows to 3' with plumes up to 5'-6'

'Rosea' - Height of 8'-12', plumes have a pink blush in late summer

Switch Grass - *Panicum*

Switch grasses are tall and narrow, with very light, airy flower clusters atop the foliage in late summer. Many have a multicolored look, with either steel blue or red on the blades.

'Northwind' - Very stiff, upright, grows to 6' high; blue-green color

'Shenandoah' - Upright, grows to 4'-5' high, with dark red tones and very pretty fall color

'Heavy Metal' - Stiff, upright, sensational metallic blue foliage, reaches 4'-5' height

Maiden Grass - *Miscanthus*

Maiden grasses come in many different heights. Some have thin foliage, others have wider foliage with stripes or variegation. Most maiden grasses have an upright arching shape. The bottom will be fairly narrow and they will fan out as they get taller. Plumes can be white, bronze, red, or tan, and can also change throughout the season.

- 'Adagio' - Hundreds of silvery plumes in fall top this dwarf maiden grass, which grows to 3'-4'
- 'Cabaret' - Grows to 6'-7', foliage blades are broad with white stripes, very showy
- 'Gold Bar' - A compact variety, grows to 4'-5' high, with horizontal gold stripes
- 'Gracillimus' - Thin green foliage, gorgeous copper colored plumes in fall, height of 5'-6'
- 'Purpurescens' - Brilliant red fall foliage, compact variety, 3'-4' height with white-mauve plumes
- 'Porcupine' - Horizontal yellow bands on green foliage, more of an upright habit, reaching 6'-8' tall
- 'Yaku Jima' - A compact variety, 3'-4' of billowing, arching foliage, with tan plumes

Fountain Grass - *Pennisetum*

Fuzzy, arching plumes in late summer make this grass stand out from all others in the landscape. These grasses tend to be shorter than most others, averaging around 3'-4' in height and spread or smaller. Foliage is very fine, which contrasts beautifully with the thick plumes.

- 'Hameln' - Dwarf fountain grass, grows to 2'-3' tall and wide, tan, fuzzy plumes in late summer
- 'Moundry' - Striking, long, dark purple foxtail-like plumes; forms a dense, upright mound to 2'-3'
- 'Oriental' - Plumes are nearly white, with a hint of pink, dense form reaches 18"-24" tall
- 'Karley Rose' - Large, pink blooms dance atop the foliage in summer, grows to 2'-3' tall
- 'Red Fountain' - Annual grass with stunning red-purple foliage and plumes, great for container plantings, or as an accent in perennial beds, worth planting every year for its magnificent color all season long

Sedge Grass - *Carex*

Sedge grasses are low-growing, clumping, fine textured grasses that add bright colors in a darker spot. These grasses can take full sun to part shade. Most grow to only 12" tall and wide, making sedge grass a great groundcover, rock garden accent, or container plant.

- 'Gold Fountains' - Narrow leaf blades have a golden edge
- 'Evergold' - Shiny green leaf blades with creamy yellow center stripes
- 'Silver Sceptre' - Green blades edged with silvery-white margins

Hakone Grass - *Hakonechloa*

Hakone grasses offer attractive, bamboo-like foliage, while growing in a clump form to 1'-2' tall. They will add color in a dark spot, due to their vivid green and gold foliage. They prefer part shade, and often will shine along shade loving perennials. These grasses also do well in container plantings.

- 'All Gold' - As the name implies, this grass has lustrous, almost metallic, spiky gold foliage
- 'Aureola' - Foliage is striped, with creamy golden yellow to green with pink and red tinges in the fall

The following will all do well in part shade area, providing a splash of color where other grasses or shrubs might just fade into the background:

- Blue Fescue Grass - *Festuca* - Soft, powdery blue, fine textured spikes, forms mound 8"-10" high and wide
- Northern Sea Oats - *Chasmanthium* - Attractive green bamboo-like foliage turns copper in the fall
- Blue Oat Grass - *Helictotrichon* - Steel-blue foliage spikes; delicate, oat-like flowers, clumping mound to 2'
- Japanese Blood Grass - *Imperata* - Upright foliage emerges green at base with brilliant, blood red tips, and spreads quickly
- Black Mondo Grass - *Ophiopogon* - A true rarity among plants with its unique, black, grass-like foliage