



WINDMILL Gardens

Gardening with Ornamental Grasses

UNIQUE LANDSCAPING OPPORTUNITY

Grasses can be used in so many ways for landscape design; from bold specimen subjects to large massed plantings waving in the breeze, as a low groundcover or edging or even in containers and tubs.

Some grasses are grown for their colorful foliage in green, gold, red, cream or white; sometimes even attractively striped or banded. Others may be valued more for their showy flower plumes, spikes or seed heads. Several kinds provide dramatic and lasting interest throughout the winter months. A few varieties can do all of the se things!

Ornamental Grasses combine will with almost any kind of plant. Although they can be used exclusively in a special border devoted to grasses, this way of planting is probably best suited to large parks and botanical gardens. The most successful way to use grasses in the smaller residential gardens that most of us have is to integrate them in a mixed planting along with perennials, annuals, bulbs, deciduous shrubs and evergreens.

GRASSES FOR EVERY GARDEN

The selection of grasses has never been better than it is today, with an astounding range of height, spread, color and flowering times available. There should be room in every garden for at least one variety of ornamental grass, as they can fill a variety of functions.

Tall, upright growing types create visual interest, especially when used towards the back of a border. Their bold lines break up space over a long season, some remaining attractive well into winter.

Medium-sized grasses may be effectively massed together, particularly in gardens with a low-maintenance emphasis. Spring-flowering bulbs combine will with these for early-season interest.

Low-growing grasses are ideal for edging around shrubs or combining with spreading evergreens. When mass-planted, they will form an attractive low-maintenance groundcover.

There are recommended varieties for every climate zone in North America, so gardeners in most regions can make use of ornamental grasses. Without question, warmer regions have a larger palette of hardy grasses available. Some of the best grasses are fortunately very hardy and will withstand quite cold temperatures. There are attractive, worthwhile grasses available for Zones 2 through 9!

HIGHLY RECOMMENDED GRASSES

This short list features some of the most outstanding varieties, chosen for their attractive features and good garden performance in many regions.

Elijah Blue Fescue (*Festuca glauca* 'Elijah Blue')

This forms an attractive tuft of metallic blue foliage. An excellent choice for edging along the front of a border or in a rock garden. This is the bluest variety available and should perform well in any sunny, well-drained area. Can be mass planted for an unusual tufted ground cover effect. Zones 3-9.

YOUR DESTINATION FOR GARDEN INSPIRATION

5816 162nd Avenue East - Sumner, WA 98390

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info@windmillgardens.com www.windmillgarden.com

Blue Oat Grass (*Helictotrichon sempervirens*). One of the absolute favorite blue grasses, these forms large dome-shaped clumps of intensely blue leaves. A cool season grass, it is perhaps the best all-around blue grass available. In late spring and summer, the tan flower spikes appear on gracefully arching stems. Zones 4-9.

Bulbous Oat Grass (*Arrhenatherum elatius* b. *Variegatum*). One of the best grasses for ground cover purposes, these plants quickly spread to form a low patch of bright white and green striped leaves. This cool-season grass looks good from early spring until mid-summer, when it benefits from a good trip to encourage fresh growth through the rest of the season. Zones 2-9.

Northern Sea Oats (*Chasmanthium latifolium*). Of medium height, this has a tropical appearance not unlike bamboo. Arching sprays of dangling flowers move constantly in the breeze from August to December. Outstanding fall and winter color. This is an excellent choice for shady locations! Zones 4-9.

Maiden Grass or Silver Grass (*Miscanthus sinensis*). There are several varieties of *Miscanthus* now available and they vary in height, leaf size and color, flower color and blooming time. All will form a large, bold clump and are much used for massing, especially in low-maintenance gardens or specimen planting. They bloom best in areas with warm summers. Zones 5-9.

Fountain Grass (*Pennisetum alopecuroides*). Perhaps the best grass for massing purposes. It is very attractive in late summer, when the soft, feathery spikes of flowers appear. This grass is worth trying even where not hardy because it performs so well the first season. Medium height. The variety 'Moudry' has dark, almost black flowers, and the variety 'Hameln' is more compact. Zones 6-9.

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