

South Surrey Garden Club

PRESENTS

‘Lighting up your garden with ornamental grasses’

BY

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There has never been a better time to explore the beauty of ornamental grasses. With so many varieties available, there is an ornamental grass for every location, from full sun to shade, wet to dry, as well as shallow and poor soils.

By incorporating ornamental grasses into the landscape you are adding form, texture, scale, color (from flowers as well as foliage), and movement. They can also be very luminous and translucent.

We are always looking for plants that offer year-round interest as well as relative low maintenance. Most ornamental grasses fit the bill and, in addition, are not water hogs or heavy feeders, rarely suffer from pests or diseases and don't require much more than an annual trim.

Understanding Cool and Warm Season Grasses

Cool Season Grasses:

Actively grow between temperatures above freezing and up to mid 20's degrees Celsius.

Are mostly evergreen (a few are deciduous).

Are mostly low growers, 2 feet maximum height.

Mostly flower late winter to early summer.

Warm Season Grasses:

Need warm soil conditions to get growing in the spring.

Grow best when temperatures are above 24 degrees Celsius.

Die back to dormant buds beneath the soil surface in the fall (perennial).

Mostly taller growers, 2-8 feet but some as high as 15 feet.

Start flowering mid-summer to first frost

Ornamental Grass Growing Tips

Cut back cool season grasses by no more two thirds in early spring as new growth starts (February-March). Here in the lower mainland you can also give your cool season grasses a light trim in September to remove any sun burnt foliage from extreme hot dry weather in the summer months. Cool season grasses can rarely tolerate being cut back hard.

Removing old dead foliage from cool season grasses can be done in several ways: raked out with a fine lawn rake or course comb. Also, you can run your fingers through the foliage starting from the crown up. This works really well if you use the rubber coated gardening gloves. If you have just trimmed them back then rubbing the palm of your hand vigorously across the top of the trimmed foliage usually dislodges dead foliage.

Warm season grasses can be cut back to the ground after the first killing frosts, but most gardeners prefer to leave the dried foliage for winter interest and therefore cut them back just before or as they start to throw up new shoots (March-early April).

If in doubt whether your grass is cool or warm season, the rule of thumb to use is: if there is still color in the foliage (not all dried and dead) after the killing frosts in the fall then it is probably a cool season grass and should be cut back by half to two thirds in the spring. If all the foliage has died back to ground level and is dried and straw looking then it is a warm season grass and can be cut back to ground level (2-4 inches).

Take a bit of time planning where in your garden you are going to locate your warm season grasses, as most have highly luminous foliage and flowers. They will look fantastic when backlit, so plant them where they will catch either early morning or evening sun for best effect or to the south part of the garden.

A common problem at planting time is planting too deep, as many types of grasses will suffer or even die if planted this way, so plant to the same soil level as in its' container. Also, if mulching, do not choke the crown, taper your mulch down so there is no mulch touching the crown of the plant. Ornamental grasses rarely require staking. Most ornamental grasses are clump forming and not heavy feeders - they require little or no additional fertilizer.

When dividing ornamental grasses, I recommend that with warm season grasses you divide them every 3-5 years to avoid the center of the plant dieing out. This is best done in the early spring or at latest as new shoots emerge from the ground. Dig out the very compact root ball and divide it into quarters with a sharp spade or even old axe! Then replant to original soil depth.

It is not as crucial to divide cool season grasses but I recommend that they also be divided every 2-3 years to get best results. Divide them the same way as with the warm season grasses and approximately the same time, just as new growth starts.

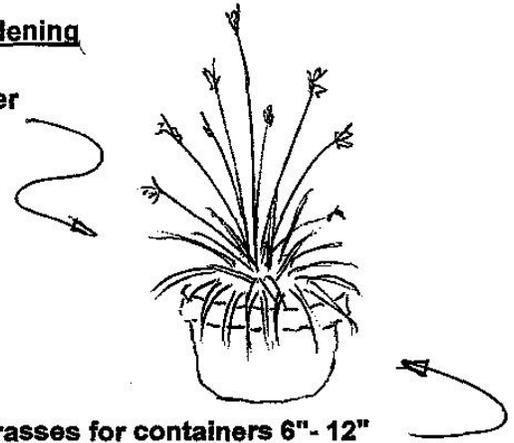
If deer eat your plants look at planting Cortadaria, Festuca, Miscanthus, and Pennisetum varieties.

Use ornamental grasses as cut flowers. To get best results from cut flower ornamental grasses, cut before flower has fully opened. The flowers will usually last a couple of weeks in water, after that drain off the water and let them dry. They will make an excellent dried arrangement and will look good for over a year.

Grasses for container gardening

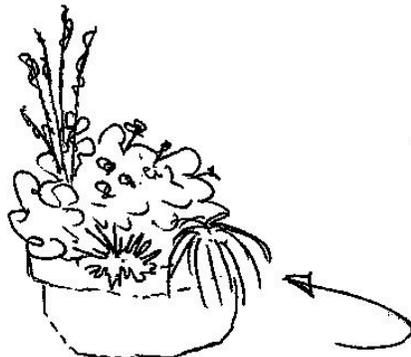
Specimen grasses for large containers 12" & bigger

- Chasmanthium latifolium
- Cortaderia pumila
- Miscanthus sinensis 'Adagio'
- Miscanthus sinensis 'Graziella'
- Miscanthus sinensis 'Malepartus'
- Miscanthus sinensis 'Morning Light'
- Miscanthus sinensis 'Rotsilber'
- Miscanthus sinensis 'Variegatus'
- Miscanthus sinensis 'Zebrinus'
- Miscanthus transmorrisonensis
- Molinia caerulea 'Moorflamme'
- Molinia caerulea 'Skyracer'
- Panicum virgatum 'Haense Herms'
- Panicum virgatum 'Heavy Metal'
- Pennisetum alopecuroides
- Pennisetum alopecuroides 'Moudry'
- Pennisetum setaceum 'Rubrum'



Specimen grasses for containers 6"- 12"

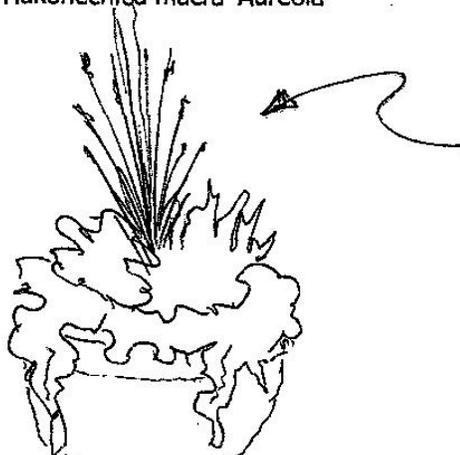
- Anemanthele lessoniana
- Carex albula 'Frosty Curis'
- Carex buchananii-
- Carex comans 'Bronze'
- Carex dipsacea
- Carex flagellifera
- Carex morrowii 'Ice Dance'
- Carex oshimensis 'Evergold'
- Carex testacea
- Festuca amethystina
- Festuca glauca 'Elijah Blue'
- Festuca idahoensis 'Siskiyou Blue'
- Hakonechloa macra 'Aureola'
- Helictotrichon sempervirens
- Imperata cylindrica 'Red Baron'
- Juncus effusus 'Gold Strike'
- Juncus patens 'Carmen's Gray'
- Molinia caerulea 'Variegata'



Grasses for edge of mixed containers

- Carex albula 'Frosty Curis'
- Carex comans 'Bronze'
- Carex oshimensis 'Evergold'
- Festuca glauca 'Elijah Blue'
- Festuca idahoensis 'Siskiyou Blue'
- Hakonechloa macra 'Aureola'

- Ophiopogon planiscapus 'Nigrescens'
- Pennisetum alopecuroides 'Little Bunny'
- Pennisetum alopecuroides 'Hamelin'
- Pennisetum messiacum 'Red Bunny Tails'
- Stipa tenuissima



Grasses for Centre of mixed containers

- Carex buchananii-
- Juncus effusus 'Gold Strike'
- Juncus patens 'Carmen's Gray'
- Miscanthus sinensis 'Adagio'
- Molinia caerulea 'Moorflamme'
- Molinia caerulea 'Skyracer'
- Molinia caerulea 'Variegata'

10 Growing Tip for Ornamental Grasses

1. Plan your garden and use ornamental grasses to add Form, Color and texture to your design.
2. Right plant, right place. Select an ornamental grass for the specific environmental conditions in your garden/container (sun/shade, wet/dry).
3. Orientation. Think about the time of day will be viewing or spending time in your garden as having your ornamental grasses backlit can be spectacular.
4. Season of interest. Select an ornamental grass that will give you impact when you want when you want it. So think about cool/warm season growers, foliage color and flower time.
5. Do not plant too deep. Most ornamental grasses should be planted so the finished soil level matches the soil level in the container it came in.
6. If putting a decorative mulch to suppress weeds around your grasses, taper the mulch down so it does not choke the crown of the plant.
7. Do not kill them with kindness. Most ornamental grasses do not need additional fertilizing; it can make them floppy and ungainly.
8. Annual hair cut. To keep them looking clean and vibrant give your ornamental grasses a trim in the spring (see page 2 of handout).
9. Most ornamental grasses are very drought tolerant. If you are going to install irrigation, I prefer low volume drip irrigation that can be covered with mulch so it is not seen.
10. If you have garden lighting consider backlighting your ornamental grasses.

Books worth looking at:

- The Color Encyclopedia of Ornamental Grasses by Rick Dark (Timber press)
The Encyclopedia of Ornamental Grasses by John Greenlee (Rodale Gardening)
Landscaping With Ornamental Grasses by Sunset Books (Sunset Books)
The Plant Finder's Guide To Ornamental Grasses by Roger Grounds (Timber Press)
Grass Scapes Gardening With Ornamental Grasses by Martin Quinn & Catherine Macleod (Whitecap)
Grasses by Nancy j. Ondra (Storey Books)
A Place In The Rain by Michael Lascelle (Whitecap)
Gardening With Grasses by Michael King & Piet Oudolf (Timber Press)
Bold Romantic Gardens by Wolfgang Oehme & James Van Sweden (Spacemaker)
Perennial Gardening Guide by John m. Valleau of Heritage Perennials

For best results buy quality ornamental grasses grown by Exemplar Horticulture from the experts at
Your Local Garden Centre