

Ornamental Grasses

Ornamental grasses perform a vital role in the landscape. Their versatility, adaptability, and beauty make them a perfect companion for perennial beds, shrub borders, and even formal settings. Because of their various sizes, shapes and textures they can be used as ground covers, accents around ponds and pools, as hedges or screens, and even as container plants.

Ornamental grasses reach their full beauty in the fall as their feathery plumes turn subtle shades of silver, tan and gold. Their leaves turn various shades of green, blue, red, orange, tan, and purple, further enriching and beautifying the landscape. Another wonderful feature of grasses is their movement. The slightest breeze will cause them to sway in the garden.

The following three grasses are examples of ground covers, or rock garden plants:

- Blue Fescue, *Festuca cinerea*, grows to about eight to ten inches tall and forms evergreen wiry tufts of blue-gray grass. The cultivar 'Elijah Blue' is known for its attractive steel blue color. This clump grass grows best in full sun and is drought tolerant. Good drainage is important especially in the winter. Blue Fescue makes an attractive accent plant when planted with purples and pinks. Division will be necessary every three to five years.
- Variegated Japanese Sedge, *Carex morrowii* 'Variegata', is a clump evergreen with silver stripes growing ten to twelve inches tall. Although it will tolerate sun, this grass will perform best in partial shade. Plant under trees or in the shade garden.
- Golden variegated Hakone Grass, *Hakonechloa macra* 'Aureola', is an elegant choice for a shade garden and blends well with ferns, epimediums, and hostas. This deciduous ground cover, growing eighteen inches tall, is unique with its delicate weeping bamboo like foliage. An added bonus is its fall color which turns pinkish red in the fall. It is also attractive as a container plant.

The following grasses have attractive colors in their leaves:

- Morning Light, *Miscanthus sinensis* 'Morning Light', is one of the most elegant, graceful grasses with its creamy white leaf margins. This refined grass grows to five feet and in the fall the plumes open to a coppery red. Morning Light will grow in light shade as well as full sun.
- Red-leaved miscanthus, *Miscanthus sinensis* 'Purpurescens', with its red orange fall color grows to about five feet tall. The silvery plumes emerge around August and begin to change to almost flame color in September. The flower heads remain attractive throughout winter. Cut this sun loving grass back by the end of March.
- Red Switch Grass, *Panicum virgatum* 'Hanes Herms', is one of the best grasses in the fall turning a deep burgundy red in September. This attractive clump forming grass grows four feet in height and is not fussy about the soil. It is best in full sun and is drought tolerant. Cut back by late winter.

- Japanese Blood Grass, *Imperata cykindrica* 'Red Baron', grows about eighteen inches tall and prefers well drained soil in full sun. As summer progresses, the foliage