

Ornamental Grasses

Ornamental grass gardens support non-turf grasses as garden borders and accents. Grass gardens help reduce erosion and accent many native plants.

What is an Ornamental Grass Garden?

Different genera and species of grasses utilized as "ornamental" grasses come from all parts of the world. Some were native and seen by Lewis and Clark as they took the Corps of Discovery on their jaunt across the continent. They described them as "great waves of tall grasses – taller than man himself." Today many of these same grasses are utilized as the ornamentals. Others had their origin in the Orient, others are from the European continent, and still others are from "down-under."

Generally speaking, three families of plants are included in the ornamental grasses. The first is the Gramineae family, which encompasses the true grasses but also includes the bamboos. The second family is the Juncaceae family, the rushes. The third is the Cyperaceae, or sedge family. All three have similarities, but also have definite distinguishing characteristics. For example, the true grasses have hollow stems that are cylindrical. Sedges have pith-filled stems which are triangular – giving rise to the saying that "sedges have edges". The rushes usually have solid cylindrical stems.

Ornamental grasses are varied in color, shape, size, texture, appearance and habit. One can find yellows, grays, blues, greens, reds, and various shades of brown and tan. They may be as short as a few inches, or twice as tall as a man. The shapes vary from upright to drooping and everything in between. Some are as soft as velvet while others may be as coarse as a file. Early spring will see many of the grasses in bloom, and others wait until fall. The flowers of many are extremely delicate and tiny. while great plumes adorn others. A

few of these fine plants are termed invasive, but they can easily be used in planters or surrounded by an edg-

Grasses may be used as accent plants, that is, to amplify the beauty of surrounding plants. They may also be used as specimen plants to be seen as outstanding by themselves without outside competition. Certainly, they can be mixed with other ornamental plants, either annual or perennial. Color can compliment or contrast with other plants. A variety of textures and forms can also add interest.

The care of ornamental grasses is very easy. Fertilizing is rarely needed. The rare one will need dividing when it overgrows its domain. Some folks may want to trim them in the fall, but most seem to enjoy the plumes all

winter – indeed. this seems to be most desirable. All in all, the care is minimal and the enjoyment is great.



on Display

Ornamental Grasses

Yellow Foxtail Alopecurus

Tufted Hairgrass

Deschampsia 'Golgehaenge' Deschampsia 'Goldstaube'

Daylily Hemerocallis 'Hyperion'

Blue Fescue Festuca ovina 'Glauca'

Reed Grass

Feather Calamagrostis 'Karl Foerster' Varigated Calamagrostis 'Overdam'

Switch Grass

Panicum 'Rotstrahlbusch' Panicum virgatum 'Heavy Metal'

Maiden Grass

Dwarf Miscanthus sin. 'Yaku Jima' Silverfeather Miscanthus sin. Sieber-

Silverveil Miscanthus sin. 'Silberpfeil' Variegated *Miscanthus "variegatus"* Miscanthus sin. 'Rotsilber' Miscanthus sinensis

Blue Oat Grass Helictotrichon sempervirens

Mexican Feather Grass Stipa tenuissima Varigated Velvet Grass Holcus mollis 'Alba Variegatus'

Sedge

Leatherleaf Carex buchananii) Golden Carex stricta 'Bowles Golden' Palm Carex musingumensis Blue Carex glauca

The Ornamental Grass Garden is #8 on the Green Zone map. The Green Zone is located at the Spokane County Conservation District and WSU/Spokane County Extension, 210 & 222 N. Havana, Spokane WA 99202. (509) 535-7274 (SCCD) (509) 477-2048 (WSU)

The Green Zone map is on page 2.

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