

Ornamental Grasses

Present garden design ideas have begun to reflect a new awareness of the links between creative expression and reverence for the larger ecology. We want plants that are at the same time inspiring to the eye and conserving of our natural resources. The focus is on the use of native plant materials and groups of plants that are easy to maintain and keep attractive, that speak to us through the season, enhance our homes and our lives, while taking little away from the environment. Ornamental grasses could not be more compatible with this new gardening philosophy.

Grasses are easy, thriving in a large range of climates and cultural conditions. Properly chosen they can contribute more beauty to the garden with less maintenance than any other group of plants. Combine them with flowering perennials, deciduous and evergreen shrubs of varying textures and colours and create a garden full of style and year round interest.

what grasses contribute

- 1 sound & movement** - grasses move and sway in the slightest breeze rustling and singing nature's song.
- 2 light & translucency** - leaves and the flowering plumes of grasses back lit or side lit by the sun take on an unrivalled luminosity; this quality is especially valuable in winter when other plants are at their lowest ebb.
- 3 quality of line** - some grasses are vertical in line while others hold their leaves with curving sinuous grace adding a strong linear presence to the garden.
- 4 form, texture & scale** - shapes of grasses vary from low tufted mounds to nearly symmetrical fountains and irregular cascades; texture can be ultra-fine to coarse; size may vary in scale from 30cm (12") to giants that attain 5m (15ft); these elements in combination form a well designed garden.
- 5 colour** - steely blue, bright green, chartreuse, yellow and red are all colours on the ornamental grass palette.

cool or warm season?

To help you choose ornamental grasses you should know that they are generally divided into 2 categories:

cool season grasses

These grasses like cool weather. They also....

- ...begin growth in late winter, have lots of foliage by early spring and flower anytime from late winter to early summer.
- ...go dormant in hot summer weather so clip back in July for lush new growth in fall. eg. *Arrhenatherum bulbosum* 'Variegatum' or Variegated Bulbous Oat Grass.
- ...some stay evergreen in mild climates but may suffer in summer heat so sheer back in late winter to remove last year's foliage and allow for fresh new growth. eg. Blue Fescue or *Festuca glauca*.

warm season grasses

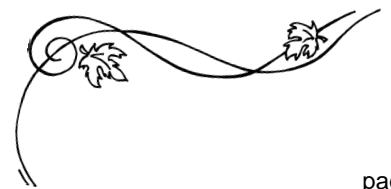
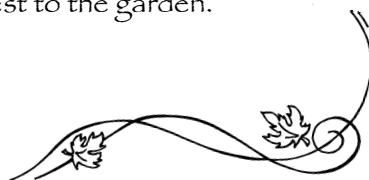
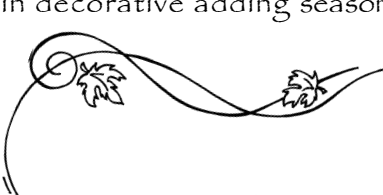
These grasses prefer it hot. They also...

- Begin to grow late in spring, grow fast in warm summer weather and flower near summers end.
- Go dormant in winter so cut back to the ground in late winter before new growth begins.
- Examples include *Miscanthus* varieties and *Pennisetum* varieties.

f.y.i

Knowing all of this, you should be aware that cool season grasses may need camouflaging while dormant in summer. Situate other plants with summer interest around them to mask the dormant grass until fresh new growth appears in fall.

Warm season grasses often take on autumnal tones as temperatures cool in fall, heightening their ornamental qualities. Even when completely dormant in winter, stalks can be golden or straw coloured and flower heads remain decorative adding seasonal interest to the garden.



grasses in the garden

Grasses are a stunningly versatile group of plants offering the home gardener myriad possibilities, limited only by the scope of the imagination.

- * Large specimens in garden borders, near pools, by ponds and watersides.
- * Groundcovers and lawn substitutes.
- * Mass plantings and broad sweeps along borders, pathways, stairways, etc.
- * Container subjects in pots and planters.
- * Contrasting texture and counterpoint to flowering perennials in mixed borders.
- * All grass borders.
- * Partners to spring bulbs in beds and naturalized rifts.



Planting Care & maintenance

As mentioned earlier, grasses are amongst the easiest of plants to grow and maintain. Most prefer full sun but will tolerate some shade though their growth may be somewhat more lax and less upright. While most grasses appreciate a well drained, reasonably fertile loam, many kinds are very adaptable to less than perfect soils. They seldom need fertilizing except when grown in pots and planters. An application of 14-14-14 slow release fertilizer in early spring and another in summer will do the trick. Drought tolerance is another desirable feature of ornamental grasses: regular watering is recommended for new plantings while established plants can usually get by with little extra water.

great combos to try

- 1 Miscanthus 'Yaku Jima' fronted by massed Pennisetum 'Moudry', then Spanish Lavender 'Otto Quast', Blue Fescue & finally Woolly Thyme, with Verbena bonariensis (tall stems, purple flowers) between Miscanthus and Pennisetum.
- 2 Stipa tenuissima (Mexican Feather Grass), Pennisetum 'Moudry', Bonica rose (pink), Aster frikartii 'Monch' (blue-violet), Artemisia 'Valerie Finnis' (silver) & Diascia 'Blackthorn Apricot' (pinkish-peach).
- 3 Miscanthus 'Strictus', Verbena bonariensis (tall stems, purple flowers), Rudbeckia 'Goldsturm' (golden yellow).
- 4 Helictotrichon (Blue Oat Grass), Miscanthus purpurascens, Bronze Fennel, Verbascum bombyciferum (Mullein), Stachys byzantina (Lamb's Ear) & Blue Fescue.
- 5 Narcissus 'February Gold' or 'Thalia' bulbs in a large drift interplanted with Blue Fescue. Or tall pink or mauve tulips planted amongst Helictotrichon (Blue Oat Grass).
- 6 Miscanthus purpurascens, Rudbeckia 'Rustic Mixture' & Sedum 'Autumn Joy'.

maple leaf's top 10 favourite grasses...

- 1 Helictotrichon (Blue Oat Grass)
- 2 Hakonechloa macra 'Aureola'
(Japanese Forest Grass)
- 3 Pennisetum 'Rubrum' (Purple Fountain Grass)
(not hardy-treat as annual)
- 4 Panicum 'Prairie Skies' (Switch Grass)
- 5 Festuca glauca 'Elijah Blue' (Blue Fescue)
- 6 Imperata cylindrica 'Red Baron'
(Japanese Blood Grass)
- 7 Pennisetum alopecuroides 'Hamelin'
(Dwarf Fountain Grass)
- 8 Carex testacea
(Orange New Zealand Sedge)
- 9 Stipa tenuissima
(Mexican Feather Grass)
- 10 Carex morrowii 'Evergold' (variegated Japanese Sedge)

shade dwellers

Some ornamental grasses that prefer shade:

- Millium effusum (Golden Millet Grass)
- Luzula species (Wood Rush)
- Hakonechloa macra 'Aureola' (Japanese Forest Grass)
- Chasmanthium latifolium (Sea Oats - also tolerates sun)
- Carex species



**maple leaf
garden centres**

1343 lynn valley rd. north van. 604-985-1784
2558 haywood ave. west van. 604-922-2613