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## ***Ornamental Grasses for the Home and Garden***

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Over 100 kinds of ornamental grasses are suitable for garden use. They range in height from 6 inches to 20 feet and are grown for their attractive foliage color or texture, distinctive plant form, or showy flowers and/or fruit.

About 70 kinds are perennial, the majority of which are winterhardy in central New York State or other areas of the Northeast in USDA Zone 5. The perennial types can be used as ground covers or specimen plants; near ponds, streams, or swimming pools; and in perennial borders, rock gardens, or naturalized areas. All the annual types as well as many of the perennials have attractive flowers and/or fruits and are excellent for dried arrangements.

Ornamental grasses are relatively free of pests and diseases and usually require only minimal maintenance.

## Landscape Descriptions

**Botanical name**    Common name

Height    Duration, Hardiness zone\*    Propagation

Flowers: color    size    time of bloom†

Foliage: color    Texture:

Plant form:

Fall color:

Winter habit:‡    Uses:§

Special soil, site:

Comments:

\*The winterhardiness rating for each plant is based on hardiness zones recorded by the United States Department of Agriculture, *Plant Hardiness Zone Map*, Misc. Pub. 814, Supt. of Doc., Gov. Print. Off., Washington, D.C. Central New York is USDA Zone 5; higher zone numbers indicate milder areas. (See map on p. 20.)

†Time of bloom: The period of time when the flowers and seeds are attractive on the plant.

1st to 10th day of the month — E

11th to 20th day of the month — M

21st to 31st day of the month — L

‡Winter habit:    1. Evergreen .....EV  
                       2. Semievergreen .....SEV  
                       3. Upright and buff colored .....UPB  
                       4. Upright but no garden value .....UPN  
                       5. Dies back to the ground .....DB

§Uses:    1. Cut flowers for fresh or dried arrangements .....CF  
               2. Annual border .....AB  
               3. Temporary or short-lived, for small, limited areas ...TE  
               4. Potted plant (interior) .....PP  
               5. Perennial border — foreground .....PBfg  
                   Perennial border — midground .....PBmg  
                   Perennial border — background .....PBbg  
               6. Specimen or accent .....SP  
               7. Ground cover .....GC  
               8. Rock garden .....RG  
               9. Naturalized area .....NA  
               10. Water garden, near ponds or streams       WA  
               11. Screen .....SC



***Acorus gramineus* 'Variegatus'** Japanese Sweet Flag

8"-10" perennial, USDA Zone 6 division

Flowers: rarely produced, green, insignificant

Foliage: green with white stripes Texture: fine

Plant form: low, open and spreading to upright-arching

Fall color: no change, beige

Special soil, site: moist soil, full sun, perhaps partial shade

Comments: attractive foliage and form for an indoor plant; requires moist soil; can be grown out-of-doors in warmer climates although exact hardiness not known.

***Arrhenatherum elatius* 'Variegatum'** Bulbous Oat Grass

18"-25" perennial, USDA Zone 5 division

Flowers: white, yellow, pale green 5"-9" E-L Aug.

Foliage: white and blue green striped Texture: fine to medium

Plant form: upright-open to low, open and spreading

Fall color: no change

Winter habit: UPN Uses: perhaps PP, PBfg, SP, RG

Special soil, site: full sun or partial shade; tolerates dry soil

Comments: attractive foliage, especially in early spring and late fall; plants apparently grow best at cool temperatures, looks poor in midsummer and can be cut back at this time; indoor plants may be troubled by black aphids.

***Arundo donax*** Giant Reed

7'-20' perennial, USDA Zone 7 or 8 division, perhaps seed

Flowers: white, light brown 12"-24" M-Oct. into winter

Foliage: light green to blue green Texture: very coarse

Plant form: upright-open to upright-arching

Fall color: brown

Winter habit: UPB, UPN Uses: CF, SP, PBbg, WA, SC

Special soil, site: full sun, well-drained soil, adequate moisture

Comments: striking appearance due to leaf texture and plant form; excellent specimen near water; needs winter protection and rarely flowers in or below USDA Zone 6; coarse texture limits use; may spread by rhizomes in mild climates; the cultivar 'Versicolor' has variegated foliage, is shorter, 3'-6' tall, and is not so hardy.



Figure 1. *Arundo donax*. TR—two-ranked leaf arrangement.

***Calamagrostis epigeous*** Feather Reed Grass

3'-6' perennial, USDA Zone 5 division, seed

Flowers: green to dark purple 10"-24" L-June-L-July

Foliage: green Texture: medium

Plant form: upright-narrow

Fall color: brown

Winter habit: UPB Uses: SP, PBmg, PBbg

Special soil, site: tolerates most soils, in sun or shade

Comments: grown for its overall appearance and slender, upright habit of growth, and tolerance of a wide variety of growing conditions; flowers are in dense panicles that spread open with age and persist into winter; usually forms a clump, but may spread by rhizomes in light, sandy soils; other variants available in the trade.

**Carex morrowii 'Expallida'** Japanese Sedge Grass  
(*C.m. 'Variegata'*; *C.m. 'Aureo-marginata'*)

6"-12" perennial, USDA Zone 6 division

Flowers: rare, insignificant, green

Foliage: yellow, green and white striped Texture: fine

Plant form: low, tufted, clump forming

Fall color: no change

Winter habit: DB Uses: PP, PBfg, SP, RG, WA

Special soil, site: full sun to light shade, moist soil

Comments: attractive foliage and form; excellent potted plant; several variants available in the trade.



Figure 2. *Carex morrowii* 'Expallida'

**Carex pendula** Sedge Grass

2'-3½' perennial, USDA Zone 5 division

Flowers: brown, pendulous 2"-4" L-June-M-Aug.

Foliage: dark green Texture: medium

Plant form: mound to upright-arching

Fall color: no change

Winter habit: SEV Uses: PBmg, PBfg, SP, WA

Special soil, site: partial shade, full sun, moist soil

Comments: very attractive foliage, dark green color and good texture; may be slow to grow from divisions; leaves may turn brown from winter injury.

**Chasmanthium latifolium** Northern Sea Oats; Spangle Grass  
(*Uniola latifolia*)

3'-5' perennial, USDA Zone 5 division, seed

Flowers: dark green, reddish brown fading to bronze 10"-12" L-July into winter

Foliage: green Texture: medium

Plant form: upright-narrow to upright-arching

Fall color: bronze, Oct.

Winter habit: upright, bronze to light brown Uses: CF, PBmg, PBbg, Sp, WA, NA

Special soil, site: does best in partial shade and fertile, well-drained soil

Comments: excellent flowers and plant form, especially attractive during fall and winter; exposure to full sun may result in shorter, light green plants; seed may be difficult to germinate.



Figure 3. *Chasmanthium latifolium*

**Coix lacryma-jobi** Job's Tears

3'-4' annual seed

Flowers: gray black, green 3"-4" M-June-L-Sept.

Foliage: green to yellow green Texture: coarse

Plant form: upright-open to upright-narrow

Fall color: brown

Winter habit: UPN, DB Uses: AB, SP, curiosity, WA

Special soil, site: grows best in partial shade with adequate moisture

Comments: curiosity plant due to beadlike seeds, beads can be used for necklaces; tolerates excessive soil moisture; coarse texture limits landscape potential; lower leaves often become brown and die.

***Cortaderia selloana*** Pampas Grass

3'-20' hort. annual, USDA Zone 5-7 division, seed  
perennial, USDA Zone 8

*Flowers:* white, perhaps pale pink 20"-36" L-Sept.-L-Oct.

*Foliage:* green *Texture:* fine to medium

*Plant form:* upright-open to upright-narrow

*Fall color:* beige

*Winter habit:* DB, UPN *Uses:* CF, PBbg, SP, WA, SC

*Special soil, site:* fertile, well-drained soil; full sun or partial shade

*Comments:* striking flowers and plant form; may be difficult to place correctly in the landscape because of large size, perhaps best suited as a specimen in a large garden area; questionable use north of USDA Zone 7 because of limited hardiness; best propagation is by division of the female (showiest) plants.

***Deschampsia caespitosa*** Tufted Hair Grass

20"-36" perennial, USDA Zone 5 division, seed

*Flowers:* white, light green 10"-15" L-June-L-Aug.

*Foliage:* dark to medium green *Texture:* fine to medium

*Plant form:* mound

*Fall color:* light brown

*Winter habit:* UPN *Uses:* CF, PBfg, SP, RG, WA, NA

*Special soil, site:* full sun, partial to full shade; adequate moisture

*Comments:* long flowering period; good plant form, may become open and unattractive by late summer; several variants with yellow flowers are available.

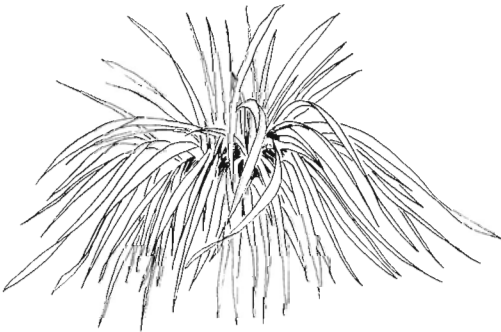


Figure 4. *Elymus arenarius*

***Elymus arenarius*** Blue Lyme Grass

20"-25" perennial, USDA Zone 4 division

*Flowers:* beige, light green 3"-4" sporadic

*Foliage:* light blue, glaucous *Texture:* coarse

*Plant form:* irregular to low, open and spreading

*Fall color:* brown, beige

*Winter habit:* DB *Uses:* PP, PBfg, PBmg, SP, WA

*Special soil, site:* full sun; tolerates damp or moist, very sandy soils

*Comments:* coarse, light blue foliage; good seashore plant; in light sandy soils, may spread extensively by rhizomes; complete loss of color with first frost; another species, *Elymus glaucus*, may be preferable for garden use — it has the same foliage color and is not rhizomatous, but is rarely available in the trade.

***Eragrostis curvula*** Weeping Love Grass

3'-5' perennial, USDA Zone 5 division, seed

Flowers: dark gray green 10"-15" L-June-E-Aug.

Foliage: light green Texture: fine

Plant form: upright-open to upright-arching

Fall color: brown, beige

Winter habit: UPB Uses: CF, PBbg, SP, NA

Special soil, site: needs adequate space to develop open and arching form; full sun

Comments: attractive form throughout summer and until hard fall frosts; may become prostrate from heavy winds and rain; self-sows liberally.



Figure 5. *Eragrostis curvula*

***Erianthus ravennae*** Plume Grass, Ravennae Grass

7'-15' perennial, USDA Zone 5 division

Flowers: silvery white, beige 12"-20" L-Sept.-L-Oct.

Foliage: green Texture: coarse

Plant form: upright-open

Fall color: brown, tinged with orange or purple

Winter habit: UPB Uses: CF, PBbg, SP, WA, SC

Special soil, site: full sun; moist, fertile, well-drained soil

Comments: attractive flowers and form, large and stately appearance; easy to grow; in colder climates, flowering may be limited by early frosts; may self-sow liberally in warm climates.

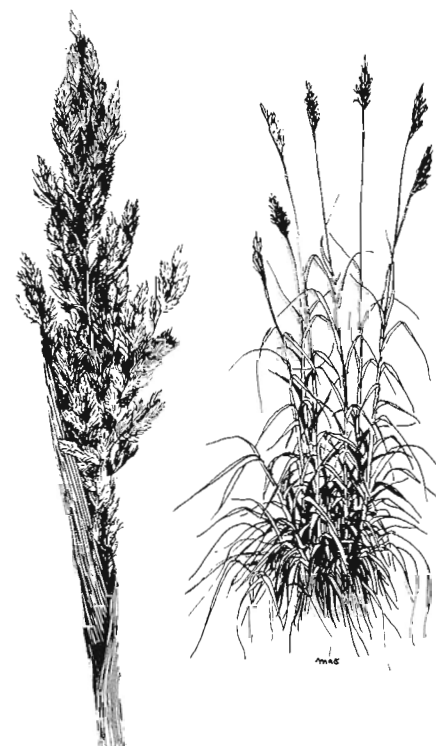


Figure 6. *Erianthus ravennae*

***Festuca amethystina*** Large Blue Fescue

1½'-3' perennial, USDA Zone 5 division, seed

Flowers: light bright green 1"-2" M-June-M-July.

Foliage: blue to blue green Texture: fine

Plant form: tufted

Fall color: blue to blue green

Winter habit: UPN Uses: PBfg, SP, RG, GC

Special soil, site: full sun; well-drained soil

Comments: dense, tufted foliage that may vary in color; grows best in full sun with good drainage; tolerates warmer climates better than *Festuca ovina* 'Glauca.'



Figure 7. *Festuca ovina* 'Glaucia'

***Festuca ovina* 'Glaucia'** Blue Fescue

6"-12" perennial, USDA Zone 4 division

Flowers: green, beige 1"-2" E-June-E-July.

Foliage: silvery blue, light blue, blue green, Texture: fine variable to shades of green

Plant form: low, tufted, clump forming

Fall color: no change

Winter habit: EV Uses: PBfg, SP, GC, RG

Special soil, site: must have well-drained soil; prefers cool climates (north of Philadelphia, Pa.); full sun or partial shade

Comments: attractive foliage color and form, evergreen; if grown in poorly drained soil, the plants require more-frequent division (every 1-2 years); may benefit from being cut back after flowering; difficult to grow in heavy clay soil in warm climates; *Festuca ovina* var. *duriuscula*, hard fescue, has wider, firmer leaves of dark blue color. Many variants of this species are sold with different foliage colors and flowering habits.

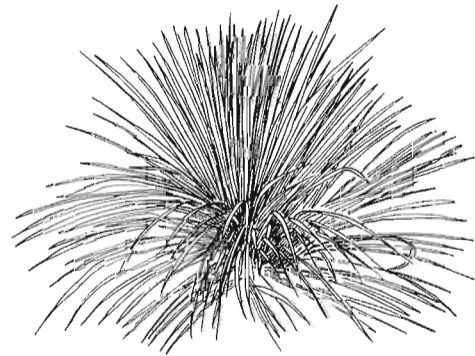


Figure 8. *Helictotrichon sempervirens*

***Helictotrichon sempervirens*** Blue Oat Grass

2'-3' perennial, USDA Zone 5 division

Flowers: beige 3"-4" sporadic

Foliage: light, glaucous blue Texture: fine to medium

Plant form: mound to tufted, clump forming

Fall color: no change

Winter habit: SEV to UPB Uses: PBmg, PBfg, SP, RG

Special soil, site: full sun, partial shade; well-drained soil

Comments: attractive and distinctive foliage and form; may become weak and open in shady locations; excessive humidity or moist conditions may promote leaf spot diseases.

***Holcus mollis* 'Variegatus'** Velvet Grass

4"-12" perennial, USDA Zone 5 division

Flowers: green and white 1"-2" E-June-E-Aug.

Foliage: green and white striped Texture: fine to medium

Plant form: low, open and spreading

Fall color: no change

Winter habit: SEV Uses: PBfg, SP, GC, RG

Special soil, site: full sun, perhaps light shade

Comments: low growing with attractive striped foliage; can be troublesome because of creeping rhizomes, especially in sandy soils.



***Hordeum jubatum*** Squirrel's-Tail Grass, Foxtail Barley

20"-30" biennial, perennial, USDA Zone 5 seed

Flowers: shining dark red, purple, 3"-4" E-June—E-July  
or green, beige with age

Foliage: green Texture: fine to medium

Plant form: upright-open

Fall color: brown

Winter habit: UPN, DB Uses: CF, TE, PBmg, NA

Special soil, site: full sun; tolerant of a wide variety of soils

Comments: early flowering, very showy when in flower; loose, open form easily becomes prostrate because of winds and rain; self-sows readily and may flower sporadically all summer; usually unattractive by mid-August and can be cut back at this time; long, sharp awns in the flowers may injure animals.

***Hystrix patula*** Bottlebrush Grass

2'-4' perennial, USDA Zone 5 seed, division

Flowers: light green 5"-8" E-Aug.-M-Oct.

Foliage: green Texture: medium

Plant form: upright-open

Fall color: beige

Winter habit: UPN-UPB Uses: CF, PBmg, WA, NA

Special soil, site: partial shade is best, will grow in full sun; moist, well-drained soil

Comments: upright form; numerous and attractive flowers and long blooming period.

***Miscanthus sacchariflorus*** Eulalia Grass

5'-10' perennial, USDA Zone 5 division, perhaps seed

Flowers: silvery white 7"-10" E-Aug. into winter

Foliage: green Texture: medium to coarse

Plant form: upright-narrow to upright-open

Fall color: orange rust in Sept.

Winter habit: UPN, UPB Uses: CF, PBbg, WA, NA, SC

Special soil, site: full sun

Comments: late summer flowering period, attractive flowers; tall graceful appearance; in light sandy soils, especially in mild climates, this species can be invasive because of rhizomes and its tendency to reseed itself; lower leaves often become brown and unattractive; may require staking if grown in shade or very fertile soils.

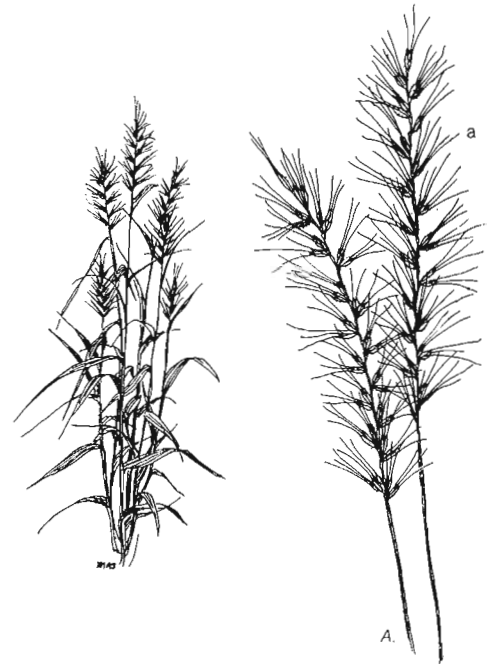


Figure 9. *Hystrix patula*. A—two spike inflorescences; a—awn.

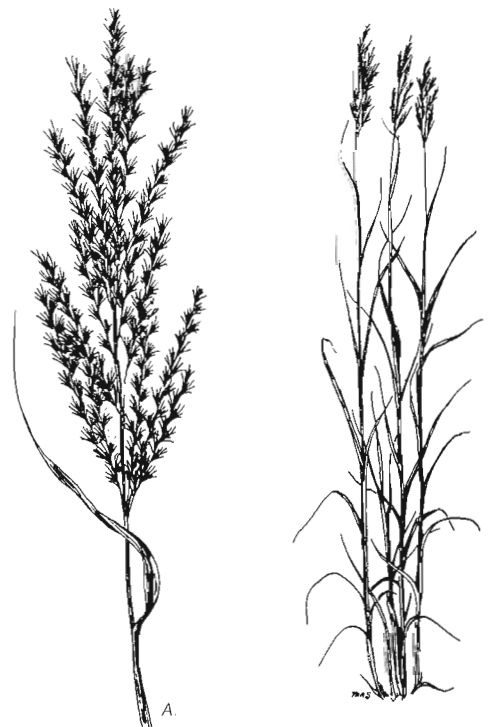


Figure 10. *Miscanthus sacchariflorus*. A—inflorescence.



Figure 11. *Miscanthus sinensis* 'Gracillimus'

***Miscanthus sinensis*** Eulalia Grass

**(*Eulalia japonica*)** Chinese Silver Grass

7'-13' perennial, USDA Zone 4 division

Flowers: pale pink or red 7"-10" September

Foliage: green Texture: medium

Plant form: upright-open

Fall color: beige, perhaps orange brown

Winter habit: UPN, UPB Uses: CF, PBbg, SP, WA, NA, SC

Special soil, site: full sun

Comments: attractive fall flowers; plants not extremely large; may require staking, especially if grown in shade or very fertile soils.

***Miscanthus sinensis* 'Gracillimus'** Maiden Grass

3'-6' perennial, USDA Zone 5 division

Flowers: reddish pink, beige with age 5"-8" E-Oct. into winter

Foliage: green, conspicuous white midvein Texture: fine

Plant form: upright-arching

Fall color: pale green

Winter habit: UPB Uses: CF, PP, PBmg, PBbg, SP, WA, SC

Special soil, site: full sun or partial shade

Comments: attractive flowers and upright form; long, curly, arching leaves; in cold climates, flowers may be injured by early fall frosts.

***Miscanthus sinensis* 'Variegatus'** Striped Eulalia Grass

3'-6' tender perennial, USDA Zone 5; hardy perennial, USDA 7 division

Flowers: pale pink, turning beige 5"-8" L-Sept.-Oct.

Foliage: yellow, white, and green striped Texture: medium

Plant form: upright-open

Fall color: pale green, beige

Winter habit: UPB, UPN Uses: CF, PBmg, SP, WA, SC

Special soil, site: full sun

Comments: one of the tallest variegated grasses; attractive foliage; good specimen plant; not so hardy or robust as the species; rarely flowers in USDA Zone 5; may require staking if grown in very fertile, shady locations.

***Miscanthus sinensis* 'Zebrinus'** Zebra Grass

4'-7' perennial, USDA Zone 5 division

Flowers: pale yellow, beige 8"-12" M-Sept.-M-Oct.

Foliage: green with horizontal yellow bands Texture: medium

Plant form: upright-narrow to upright-open

Fall color: beige or brown

Winter habit: UPN Uses: CF, PBbg, SP, WA, SC

Special soil, site: full sun, light shade

Comments: interesting and unique foliage; ideal specimen plant; late flowering period, flowers may be injured by early fall frosts; plants require staking if grown in shady locations. Several other forms of *Miscanthus sinensis* are available, the most notable being (1) *M. sinensis* 'Silver Feather' (also known as 'Silberfeder'), 6'-9' in height, flowers in August, much earlier than the species, with flowers well above the foliage; (2) *M. sinensis* 'Strictus,' 6'-8' tall, has foliage similar to *M. sinensis* 'Zebrinus', although the yellow bands are usually more pronounced, and overall form is very upright-narrow and much straighter than *M. sinensis* 'Zebrinus'; and (3) *M. sinensis* 'Purpurascens', red-leaved miscanthus, 3'-5' tall, foliage develops red coloring as summer progresses, distinctive red fall color, flowers earlier than the species.



Figure 12. *Miscanthus sinensis* 'Zebrinus'

***Molinia caerulea* 'Variegata'** Purple Moor Grass

1'-2' perennial, USDA Zone 5 division

Flowers: yellow, green, purple 5"-8" L-June-L-Aug.

Foliage: yellow, green striped Texture: fine

Plant form: upright-arching

Fall color: none, brown with hard frosts

Winter habit: DB Uses: PP, PBfg, SP, GC, RG, WA

Special soil, site: full sun or partial shade

Comments: attractive foliage from mid-May until early November; long flowering period; low growing; moist, humid conditions may promote rust or leaf spot diseases.

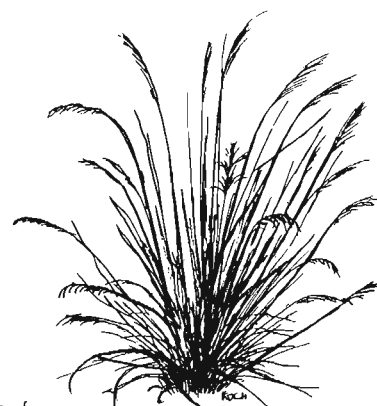


Figure 13. *Molinia caerulea* 'Variegata'

***Oplismenus hirtellus* 'Variegatus'** Basket Grass

2'-3', trailing stems indoor plant division, cuttings

Flowers: green, dark red 1"-2" sporadic

Foliage: green, white, pink, purple striped Texture: medium

Plant form: low, open and spreading, to irregular

Fall color: —

Winter habit: — Uses: PP

Special soil, site: needs adequate moisture, soil should not be allowed to dry out; requires high light to develop pink, purple stripes

Comments: good hanging-basket plant, grows rapidly, attractive foliage; may require high light (greenhouse/conservatory) for dense growth; out-of-doors winter-hardiness is not known.



Figure 14. *Oplismenus hirtellus* 'Variegatus'



Figure 15. *Panicum virgatum*. A—panicle inflorescence; sp—spikelet.

***Panicum virgatum*** Switch Grass

3'-6' perennial, USDA Zone 5 division, seed

Flowers: dark red purple fading to beige 12"-16" L-July-E Sept.

Foliage: green Texture: medium

Plant form: upright-narrow

Fall color: medium to bright yellow, mid-Sept.-Oct.

Winter habit: UPB Uses: CF, PBmg, NA, WA, SC

Special soil, site: full sun, partial shade

Comments: dense, upright form persists into winter for garden interest and as a valuable wildlife cover; good fall color in the Northeast; in light, sandy soils, may spread slowly because of rhizomes; may require staking in shady locations; *P. virgatum* 'Rubrum', Red Switch Grass, 3'-4' tall, has foliage tinged with red and with crimson fall color; *P. virgatum* 'Strictum' is more upright, shorter, 3'-4' tall, and blooms slightly earlier.

***Pennisetum alopecuroides*** Fountain Grass

4'-4½' perennial, USDA Zone 5 division

Flowers: coppery tan or reddish 6"-8" L-Aug.-E-Oct.

Foliage: green Texture: medium-fine

Plant form: mound

Fall color: yellow, mid-Oct.

Winter habit: UPB, UPN Uses: PBfg, PBmg, SP, WA

Special soil, site: full sun, light shade; needs adequate room to develop

Comments: excellent form, numerous flowers, late blooming period, showy fall color; division is required every 5-10 years to prevent the center of the plant from dying out; the cultivar 'Hameln' is shorter and more compact, reaching about 2½' tall.

***Pennisetum setaceum* (*P. ruppelii*)** Crimson Fountain Grass

2'-3' hort. annual, USDA Zone 5-8; perennial, USDA Zone 8-9 seed

Flowers: dark purple, red 9"-12" L-July-E-Oct.

Foliage: green, purple to dark red in variants Texture: fine

Plant form: mound to upright-arching

Fall color: beige

Winter habit: DB, UPN Uses: AB, PBmg, PBfg, SP, WA

Special soil, site: full sun or partial shade

Comments: numerous and attractive flowers; in warm or mild climates may become weedy; in colder areas becomes unattractive after hard frosts in the fall.

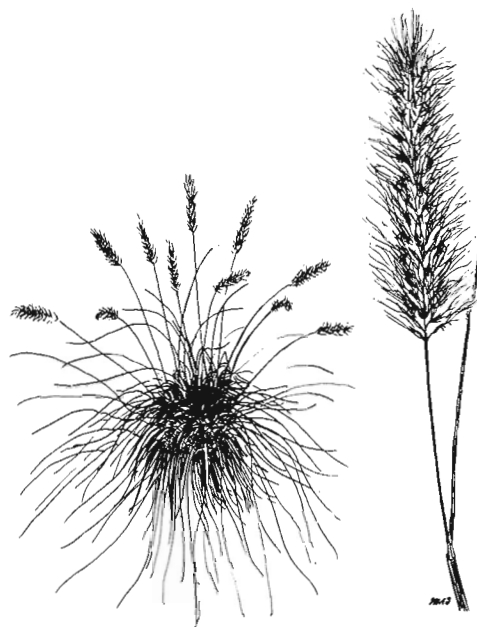


Figure 16. *Pennisetum alopecuroides*



Figure 17. *Pennisetum setaceum*

***Pennisetum villosum*** Feather Top

18"-30" hort. annual, USDA Zone 5-8; perennial, USDA Zone 8-9 seed

Flowers: tawny, white, light green 3"-5" L-July-L-Sept.

Foliage: green Texture: medium

Plant form: mound to irregular

Fall color: beige

Winter habit: DB or UPN Uses: AB, PBfg

Special soil, site: full sun or partial shade; adequate moisture

Comments: attractive flowers; dies with first frost in colder areas; plants may become open and unattractive from exposure to heavy winds and rain.

***Phalaris arundinacea* 'Picta'** Ribbon Grass

2'-4½' perennial, USDA Zone 4 division

Flowers: white, pale pink 4"-6" E-June-M-July

Foliage: white, green, perhaps pink striped Texture: medium

Plant form: upright-open

Fall color: beige

Winter habit: DB Uses: PBmg, SP, WA, perhaps GC

Special soil, site: full sun or partial shade; tolerates wet soil

Comments: attractive foliage color in early spring and midsummer; good plant for poor soil; may be invasive in light sandy soils because of rhizomes; foliage fades and becomes brown by mid-August; plants often become unattractive from winds and rain; can benefit from being cut back to the ground in midsummer, allowing new foliage to develop.

***Rhynchelytrum repens*** Ruby Grass

2'-4' hort. annual, USDA Zone 5-9; perennial, USDA Zone 9 seed

Flowers: ruby red fading to pink or silvery white 6"-10" L-July-E-Oct.

Foliage: green, upper leaves often tinged with purple Texture: medium

Plant form: upright-open to irregular

Fall color: pale green

Winter habit: UPN Uses: CF, AB, PBfg, PBmg

Special soil, site: full sun

Comments: long fall blooming period, very attractive flowers; may become open and unattractive in shady locations or very fertile soil; flowers may be injured by early fall frosts in cold regions.

***Spartina pectinata* 'Aureo-marginata'** Cord Grass  
**(*S. michauxiana* 'Aureo-marginata')**

4'-8' perennial, USDA Zone 5 division

Flowers: light yellow, beige 6"-15" L-Aug.-L-Sept.

Foliage: shiny green with yellow marginal stripes Texture: medium to coarse

Plant form: upright-open to upright-arching

Fall color: yellow, Oct.

Winter habit: UPN, UPB Uses: CF, PBmg, PBbg, SP, WA, NA, SC

Special soil, site: full sun; native to sandy soils, tolerates wet soil

Comments: attractive foliage, some fall color; good seashore plant; may become invasive in sandy soils because of creeping rhizomes; lower leaves may become brown early in the season.



Figure 18. *Pennisetum villosum*. b—bristle.



Figure 19. *Rhynchelytrum repens*



Figure 20. *Spartina pectinata* 'Aureo-marginata'



## Additional Ornamental Grasses, Sedges, Rushes

Botanical name	Common name
<i>Alopecurus pratensis</i> 'Aureus'	Yellow Foxtail
<i>Carex buechananii</i>	Leatherleaf Sedge
<i>Cymbopogon citratus</i> *	Lemon Grass
<i>Dactylis glomerata</i> 'Variegatus'	Cock's-Foot Grass
<i>Deschampsia flexuosa</i>	Wavy Hair Grass
<i>Elymus interruptus</i>	Nodding Lyme Grass
<i>Festuca gigantea</i>	Giant Fescue
<i>Glyceria maxima</i> 'Variegata'	Variegated Mannagrass
<i>Hakonechloa macra</i> 'Albo-aurea'	Golden Hakonechloa
<i>Imperata cylindrica</i> 'Rubra'	Blood Grass
<i>Koeleria glauca</i>	June Grass
<i>Luzula nivea</i>	Snowy Woodrush
<i>Luzula sylvatica</i>	Greater Woodrush
<i>Melica altissima</i> 'Atropurpurea'	Purple Melic
<i>Milium effusum</i> 'Aureum'	Millet Grass
<i>Miscanthus floridulus</i>	Giant Miscanthus
<i>Schizachyrium scoparium</i>	Little Bluestem
<i>Sesleria caerulea</i>	Blue Moor Grass
<i>Setaria palmifolia</i> 'Variegata'*	Palm Grass
<i>Stipa gigantea</i>	Giant Feathergrass
<i>Stipa pennata</i>	Feathergrass
<i>Zea mays</i> 'Variegata'	Ornamental Corn
<i>Zizania aquatica</i>	Wild Rice

Note: All plants are perennials except *Zea mays* 'Variegata,' which is annual.

\* Tender perennial.

## Grasses for Special Uses

Botanical name	Common name
WATER GARDENS	
<i>Acorus gramineus</i> 'Variegatus'	Japanese Sweet Flag
<i>Alopecurus pratensis</i> 'Aureus'	Yellow Foxtail
<i>Arundo donax</i> and <i>A. d.</i> 'Versicolor'	Giant Reed
<i>Calamagrostis epigeous</i>	Feather Reed Grass
<i>Carex buechananii</i>	Leatherleaf Sedge
<i>Carex morrowii</i> 'Expallida'	Japanese Sedge Grass
<i>Deschampsia caespitosa</i>	Tufted Hair Grass
<i>Glyceria maxima</i> 'Variegata'	Variegated Mannagrass
<i>Panicum virgatum</i>	Switch Grass
<i>Miscanthus sinensis</i>	Eulalia Grass
<i>Miscanthus sinensis</i> 'Zebrinus'	Zebra Grass
<i>Molinea caerulea</i> 'Variegatus'	Purple Moor Grass
<i>Spartina pectinata</i> 'Aureo-marginata'	Cord Grass
SHADY LOCATIONS	
<i>Calamagrostis epigeous</i>	Feather Reed Grass
<i>Carex pendula</i>	Pendulous Sedge Grass
<i>Carex</i> spp.	Sedges
<i>Chasmanthium latifolium</i>	Northern Sea Oats
<i>Deschampsia caespitosa</i>	Tufted Hair Grass
<i>Festuca gigantea</i>	Giant Fescue
<i>Hystrix patula</i>	Bottlebrush Grass
<i>Luzula</i> spp.	Woodrushes
<i>Melica altissima</i> 'Atropurpurea'	Purple Melic
<i>Milium effusum</i> 'Aureum'	Millet Grass
<i>Molinea caerulea</i> 'Variegata'	Purple Moor Grass
<i>Stipa pennata</i>	Feather Grass
NATURALIZED AREAS	
<i>Bouteloua gracilis</i>	Side Oats Grama
<i>Briza media</i>	Quaking Grass
<i>Chasmanthium latifolium</i>	Northern Sea Oats
<i>Deschampsia caespitosa</i>	Tufted Hair Grass
<i>Eragrostis curvula</i>	Weeping Love Grass
<i>Eragrostis trichodes</i>	Sand Love Grass
<i>Festuca gigantea</i>	Giant Fescue
<i>Hystrix patula</i>	Bottlebrush Grass
<i>Luzula</i> spp.	Woodrushes
<i>Miscanthus sacchariflorus</i>	Eulalia Grass
<i>Miscanthus sinensis</i>	Eulalia Grass
<i>Panicum virgatum</i>	Switch Grass
<i>Phalaris canariensis</i>	Canary Grass
<i>Schizachyrium scoparium</i>	Little Bluestem
<i>Sorghastrum nutans</i>	Indian Grass

## Grasses for Dried Arrangements

Many ornamental grasses have flowers that are excellent for use in dried arrangements. To dry the flowers, cut them as soon as they appear and hang them upside down (or upright in a container for curved stems) for 7 to 10 days in a cool, dry location that has good air circulation. The earlier the flowers are cut, the less chance they will shatter. Once they are dry, they can be used in arrangements, stored, or dyed.

Florists often sell grasses in natural and brightly dyed colors. The colors are achieved by dipping the dried flowers in a boiling water solution containing a strong chemical dye (clothing or aniline dye) and a mordant such as alum.

Ornamental grasses look especially well when used in arrangements with other dried flowers such as strawflower, money plant, cattail, yarrow, and statice.

Almost all annual grasses have flowers suitable for dried arrangements. The following grasses are recommended for use in arrangements (A = annual, P = perennial).

Botanical name	Common name	Duration
<i>Agrostis nebulosa</i>	Cloud Grass	A
<i>Aira capillaris</i> var. <i>pulchella</i>	Hair Grass	A
<i>Ampelodesmos mauritanicus</i>	Mauritania	P
<i>Apera interrupta</i>	Dense Silky Bent Grass	A
<i>Apera spica-venti</i>	Loose Silky Bent	A
<i>Avena sterilis</i> ; <i>A. fatua</i>	Animated and Wild Oats	A
<i>Bouteloua gracilis</i>	Side Oats Grama	P
<i>Briza maxima</i>	Large Quaking Grass	A
<i>Briza media</i>	Quaking Grass	P
<i>Briza minor</i>	Little Quaking Grass	A
<i>Bromus macrostachys</i>	Brome Grass	A
<i>Bromus</i> spp.	Brome Grass	A
<i>Desmazeria sicula</i>	Spike Grass	A
<i>Eragrostis trichodes</i>	Sand Love Grass	P
<i>Eragrostis</i> spp.	Love Grass	A or P
<i>Hordeum vulgare</i>	Barley	A
<i>Imperata brevifolia</i>	Satin Tail	P
<i>Lagurus ovatus</i>	Hare's-Tail Grass	A
<i>Lamarkia aurea</i>	Golden Top	A
<i>Phalaris canariensis</i>	Canary Grass	A
<i>Phleum pratensis</i>	Timothy	A
<i>Polypogon monspeliensis</i>	Rabbit's-Foot Grass	A
<i>Rhynchelytrum repens</i>	Ruby Grass	A or P
<i>Setaria italica</i>	Foxtail Millet	A
<i>Sitanion hystrix</i>	Squirrel's-Tail Grass	P
<i>Stipa pennata</i> ; <i>Stipa</i> spp.	Feather Grass	P
<i>Triticum</i> spp.	Wheat	A
<i>Uniola paniculata</i>	Sea Oats	P

## Culture and Maintenance

Ornamental grasses usually require minimal care throughout the growing season. The cultural practices vary depending on the plant's duration, either annual (horticultural annuals are included here as well) or perennial.

Annual grasses are grown from seed each year. For earlier flowering, the plants can be started indoors, or the seed can be grown directly in the garden after the danger of frost is past. Spacing for most plants is 6 to 12 inches apart. Almost all annuals prefer full sun and require only adequate moisture and fertile soil for good growth.

Perennial grasses can be grown from seed, but are usually purchased as plants. Spacing for plants approximately 4 feet tall is 2 to 3 feet apart; larger plants require more spacing whereas shorter plants can be spaced about 1 foot apart. Most perennials prefer full sun or, in some cases, partial shade. Many of the perennial grasses are showiest in late fall. For this reason, it is desirable to carry out the cultural practices of division and cutting the plants back to the ground in early spring. The practice of cutting the plants back to within 6 inches from the ground is especially desirable for large, dense plants. Removing the previous year's growth has the following advantages: (1) ensures vigorous growth, (2) acts as a pruning method for removal of dead stems, and (3) creates a more-attractive plant. Division of perennials should occur about every 7 to 10 years (exception: *Festuca ovina* 'Glaucia', see description). Some species can grow in place for several years and actually look best when allowed to do so. All divisions should be made when the plants are dormant or just before they begin to grow in early spring. The need for division is determined by the appearance of the new growth in the spring. If a plant shows signs of growth only around the edges and not in the center, the middle of the plant is probably dead and the plant should be divided. Grasses that show uniform new growth can be left in place for a longer period of time.

The only cultural practice that may be necessary is staking the flowering stems of some of the larger plants. If the plants are grown in shady locations with very fertile soil, staking may be necessary.

## Glossary and Key to Selected Types of Ornamental Grasses

A key to the identification of 41 types of ornamental grasses is given; many are illustrated and described in another section of the bulletin.

A key is a device used to identify unknown plants and is composed of *couplets*, which are two sentences with the same number, each of which is called a *lead*.

To use the key, begin with the first set of couplets, both numbered 1, and read both of these to decide which best describes the unknown plant in question. Select the most appropriate number 1 lead, and then read the next couplet of leads that immediately follows. For example, suppose you had a plant that had uniform green foliage; you would read both leads numbered 1 and accept the second number 1; then proceed to couplet 14 (see key) and choose the first or second lead numbered 14, whichever describes the plant in question; then proceed to numbers 15 and so forth. *Always read both leads of the same number before selecting one or the other.*

Eventually you will read a lead that correctly describes the unknown plant in question and ends with the plant name. If however, neither lead describes the plant, it is possible that the plant may not be in the key.

Terms and definitions are explained in the glossary preceeding the key. The key is intended to be used in conjunction with the plant illustrations and descriptions given in the bulletin.

## Glossary

Annual – completing one life cycle from seed to flowering in one growing season and then dying; usually propagated from seed.

Awn – slender hairlike projection(s) arising from the small flowers of grasses; variable in length and texture (see fig. 9, *Hystrix patula*).

Basal – pertaining to the base of the plant, at ground level; arising from or occurring at the base.

Bristle – slender hairlike projections arising from the petiole or branches of the inflorescence, sometimes surrounding the spikelet (see fig. 18, *Pennisetum villosum*).

Cespitose – forming tufts or mounds of foliage.

Corms – very short, thick, firm, fleshy stems, usually broader than high, just below ground or at ground level.

Fibrous roots – a root system in which the roots are finely divided, usually in a clump.

Glaucous – covered with a bluish or whitish substance that rubs off.

Horticultural annual – plants that are treated as annuals in cold climates, but are perennials in warmer regions.

Inflorescence – the total flowering structure and arrangement of individual flowers on the main stem (see fig. 10, *Miscanthus sacchariflorus*).

Ligule – the small membrane or ring of hairs that occurs on the upper side of the leaves, at the junction of the leaf blade and the sheath that wraps around the stem; reduced or absent in some species (see fig. 18, *Pennisetum villosum*).

Panicle – an open, often branched and spreading flowering structure; one type of inflorescence (see fig. 15, *Panicum virgatum*).

Papery bracts – a series of small, dry (papery) structures that surround or enclose the seed of almost all grasses (the spikelet).

Perennial – a plant that lives for an indefinite number of growing seasons; usually propagated from division, perhaps seed; may or may not flower the first growing season, but continues to grow and flower thereafter.

Rhizomes – underground stems (resembling roots), usually growing horizontally and rooting at the nodes.

Spike – a narrow and usually longer than wide inflorescence, the flowers borne along one main stem (see fig. 9, *Hystrix patula*).

Spikelet – the small flowering unit of grasses, consisting of a series of bracts placed one inside another, attached to a branch or the main flowering stem; there are many spikelets in one inflorescence (see fig. 15, *Panicum virgatum*).

Stolons – horizontal stems, usually prostrate or trailing at ground level, always above the ground, often rooting at the nodes.

Two-ranked – an alternate arrangement of leaves with the adjoining leaves on opposite sides of the stem, the third leaf directly above the first (see fig. 1, *Arundo donax*).

## Key to Forty-One Ornamental Grasses

- 1 Plants with foliage striped with white or yellow; or uniformly blue, blue gray; not uniformly green.
  - 2 Foliage uniformly blue, blue gray, or glaucous.
    - 3 Plants 6"-10" tall.  
*Festuca ovina* 'Glaucia' Blue Fescue
    - 3 Plants 12"-30" tall.
      - 4 Leaves 1/8"-3/16" wide, mostly basal or on short stems; roots fibrous.  
*Helictotrichon sempervirens* Blue Oat Grass
      - 4 Leaves 1/2"-5/8" wide, basal or arising from a visible stem; rhizomes present.  
*Elymus arenarius* Lyme Grass
  - 2 Foliage with yellow or white stripes.
    - 5 Leaves with horizontal yellow bands.  
*Miscanthus sinensis* 'Zebrinus' Zebra Grass
    - 5 Leaves with longitudinal yellow or white stripes.
      - 6 Plants with fibrous root systems.
        - 7 Height of plants 3'-5'.  
*Miscanthus sinensis* 'Variegatus' Striped Eulalia
        - 7 Height of plants 20" or less.
          - 8 Leaves 3/16"-1/4" wide, arching, tapering at the end, curled, forming low dense mounds; often an indoor potted plant; rarely flowering, if so, on triangular stems.  
*Carex morrowii* 'Expallida' Japanese Sedge Grass
          - 8 Leaves 1/4"-3/8" wide, upright; if basal, not in curled mounds; grown outdoors; flowers common, on round stems.  
*Molinea caerulea* 'Variegata' Purple Moor Grass
    - 6 Plants with rhizomes, stolons, or corms (bulbous basal structures).
      - 9 Leaf arrangement fan-shaped, arising directly from a visible rhizome (like a miniature Iris); blades slender and with no midrib; indoor potted plant.  
*Acorus gramineus* 'Variegatus' Japanese Sweet Flag
      - 9 Leaf arrangement not fan-shaped, basal or along a stem; rhizome, if present, underground; blades with a midrib.
        - 10 Plants with 20"-36" long trailing stems (stolons); usually an indoor potted plant for hanging baskets.  
*Opismenus hirtellus* 'Variegatus' Basket Grass
        - 10 Plants with upright stems or, if long trailing, with rhizomes, not stolons.
          - 11 Leaves 30" long or more.  
*Spartina pectinata* 'Aurea-marginata' Cord Grass
          - 11 Leaves rarely longer than 10".
            - 12 Plants with miniature corms at base of stem.  
*Arrhenatherum elatius* 'Variegatum' Bulbous Oat Grass
            - 12 Plants with rhizomes.
              - 13 Leaves and stems essentially smooth, without hairs; plants 2'-5' tall.  
*Phalaris arundinacea* 'Picta' Ribbon Grass
              - 13 Leaves and stems soft and velvety, covered with short, soft hairs; plants 8"-20" tall.  
*Holcus mollis* 'Variegatus' Velvet Grass

- 1 Plants with foliage uniformly green.
  - 14 Plants with visible hard, teardrop seeds (beadlike), 1/4"-1/2" long, 1/4" wide; gray, white, or black.
 

*Coix lacryma-jobi* Job's Tears
  - 14 Plants with small seeds, enclosed in papery bracts; not black, round, or beadlike.
    - 15 Height of plants 4' or more.
      - 16 Leaves 1"-3" wide, conspicuously 2-ranked.
 

*Arundo donax* Giant Reed
      - 16 Leaves rarely wider than 1", 2-ranked but not so conspicuous.
        - 17 Soft, conspicuous hairs covering or surrounding the spikelet.
          - 18 Inflorescence at least 20" long, often 2'-3' long, open, and very showy.
 

*Cortaderia selloana* Pampas Grass
          - 18 Inflorescence rarely over 20" long, never 2'-3' long.
            - 19 Leaves 1/4" wide, midvein conspicuously white.
 

*Miscanthus sinensis* 'Gracillimus' Maiden Grass
            - 19 Leaves 1/2"-1" wide.
              - 20 Ligule a small ring of hairs, 1/8" long or less; plants 5'-8' tall; inflorescence with several slender branches, each 4"-8" long.
                - 21 Hairs on the inflorescence white or ivory; plants with rhizomes.
 

*Miscanthus sacchariflorus* Eulalia Grass
                - 21 Hairs on the inflorescence yellow or beige.
 

*Miscanthus sinensis* Eulalia Grass
              - 20 Ligule a dense ring of hairs, 1/4"-1/2" long; plants 8'-15' tall; inflorescence on 1 main stem, 10"-20" long, becoming soft and dense with age.
 

*Erianthus ravennae* Plume Grass
      - 17 Soft conspicuous hairs absent; spikelets essentially smooth.
        - 22 Inflorescence 20"-30" long.
 

*Cortaderia selloana* Pampas Grass
        - 22 Inflorescence less than 14" long.
          - 23 Leaves 20"-40" long, less than 3/16" wide.
 

*Eragrostis curvula* Weeping Love Grass
          - 23 Leaves rarely over 18" long, 1/2" wide.
            - 24 Inflorescence on 1 main stem, stiff, narrow and upright, in upright spikes.
 

*Hystrix patula* Bottlebrush Grass
            - 24 Inflorescence open, branched, nodding or spreading.
              - 25 Spikelets very small, 1/8" long.
 

*Panicum virgatum* Switch Grass
              - 25 Spikelets 3/4"-1 1/4" long, conspicuously flattened.
 

*Chasmanthium latifolium* Northern Sea Oats



- 15 Height of plants less than 4'.
- 26 Plants with dark green, leathery leaves, 1/4"-3/4" wide, 20"-30" long, evergreen, with grooves or folds in the leaves.  
*Carex pendula* Sedge Grass
- 26 Plants with medium-light-green leaves, rarely 3/4" wide, if so, never 20"-30" long; not evergreen or leathery.
- 27 Inflorescence open branched, secondary branches easily visible.
- 28 Flowers pink or ruby red, turning silvery white with age; spikelets covered with conspicuous soft hairs.  
*Rhynchelytrum repens* Ruby Grass
- 28 Flowers beige, green, or white; spikelets smooth or covered with very short hairs.
- 29 Plants 2' tall or less.
- 30 Inflorescence 4"-7" long, spikelets coarse, 1 1/2"-2" long, with awns 1/2"-1" long.  
*Bromus macrostachys* Brome Grass
- 30 Inflorescence 2"-4" long, spikelets less than 3/4" long, awns minute or absent.
- 31 Spikelets less than 1/16" wide; inflorescence finely branched; plants very fine textured.  
*Aira capillaris* var. *pulchella* Hair Grass
- 31 Spikelets 1/8"-3/8" wide, inflated, papery, and light; plants fine to medium textured.
- 32 Plants 18"-24" tall; spikelets 1/2"-3/4" long, nodding, and inflated.  
*Briza maxima* Big Quaking Grass
- 32 Plants 8"-12" tall; spikelets 1/8" long or less, heart-shaped, upright, and spreading.  
*Briza minor* Little Quaking Grass
- 29 Plants 2'-4' tall.
- 33 Plants annual, leaves dying after flowering is completed.  
*Apera spica-venti* Loose Silky Bent Grass
- 33 Plants perennial, leaves green after flowering.
- 34 Inflorescence 3"-4" long.  
*Briza media* Quaking Grass
- 34 Inflorescence 9"-20" long.
- 35 Ligule 1/4" long; inflorescence never wider than 6", fairly upright.  
*Deschampsia caespitosa* Tufted Hair Grass
- 35 Ligule a ring of sparse hairs or absent; inflorescence 10"-12" wide at maturity, arching, nodding, rarely, if ever, upright.  
*Eragrostis trichodes* Sand Love Grass

- 27 Inflorescence a spike or spikelike, along one main stem, secondary branches very small, if any; bristles or awns present or absent.
- 36 Spikes 1"-2" long, one-sided (like a comb), perpendicular to the main flowering stem.  
*Bouteloua gracilis* Side Oats Grama
- 36 Spikes longer than 1"-2", or if 1"-2" long, the spikelets placed on all sides of the flowering stem.
- 37 Bristles, awns, or hairlike projections 3/4"-3" long present in the inflorescence.
- 38 Leaves 10" long.
- 39 Bristles 3"-4" long; total spike 2"-4" long, nodding, shining, and silky.  
*Hordeum jubatum* Squirrel's-Tail Grass
- 39 Bristles 3/4"-1 1/2" long; spikes 5"-18" long, stiff and upright.  
*Hystrix patula* Bottlebrush Grass
- 38 Leaves 1'-3' long.
- 40 Inflorescence tawny, beige, or light green, 3"-5" long.  
*Pennisetum villosum* Feather Top Grass
- 40 Inflorescence coppery tan, purple, or brown, 6"-12" long.
- 41 Leaves 1/8"-3/16" wide; spikes purple, 9"-12" long; annual in cold climates.  
*Pennisetum setaceum* Crimson Fountain Grass
- 41 Leaves 1/4"-3/8" wide; spikes coppery tan or reddish brown, 6"-8" long; perennial.  
*Pennisetum alopecuroides* Fountain Grass
- 37 Bristles or awns less than 1" long or absent; spikes very dense, soft, and compacted.
- 42 Leaves soft and velvety; inflorescence in soft, dense, woolly "heads," 1"-2" long, rarely longer, 3/4"-1" wide.  
*Lagurus ovatus* Hare's-Tail Grass
- 42 Leaves smooth, not velvety; inflorescence soft, dense, 2"-6" long, 1/2"-3/4" wide.  
*Polypogon monspeliensis* Rabbit's-Foot Grass

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## Suppliers

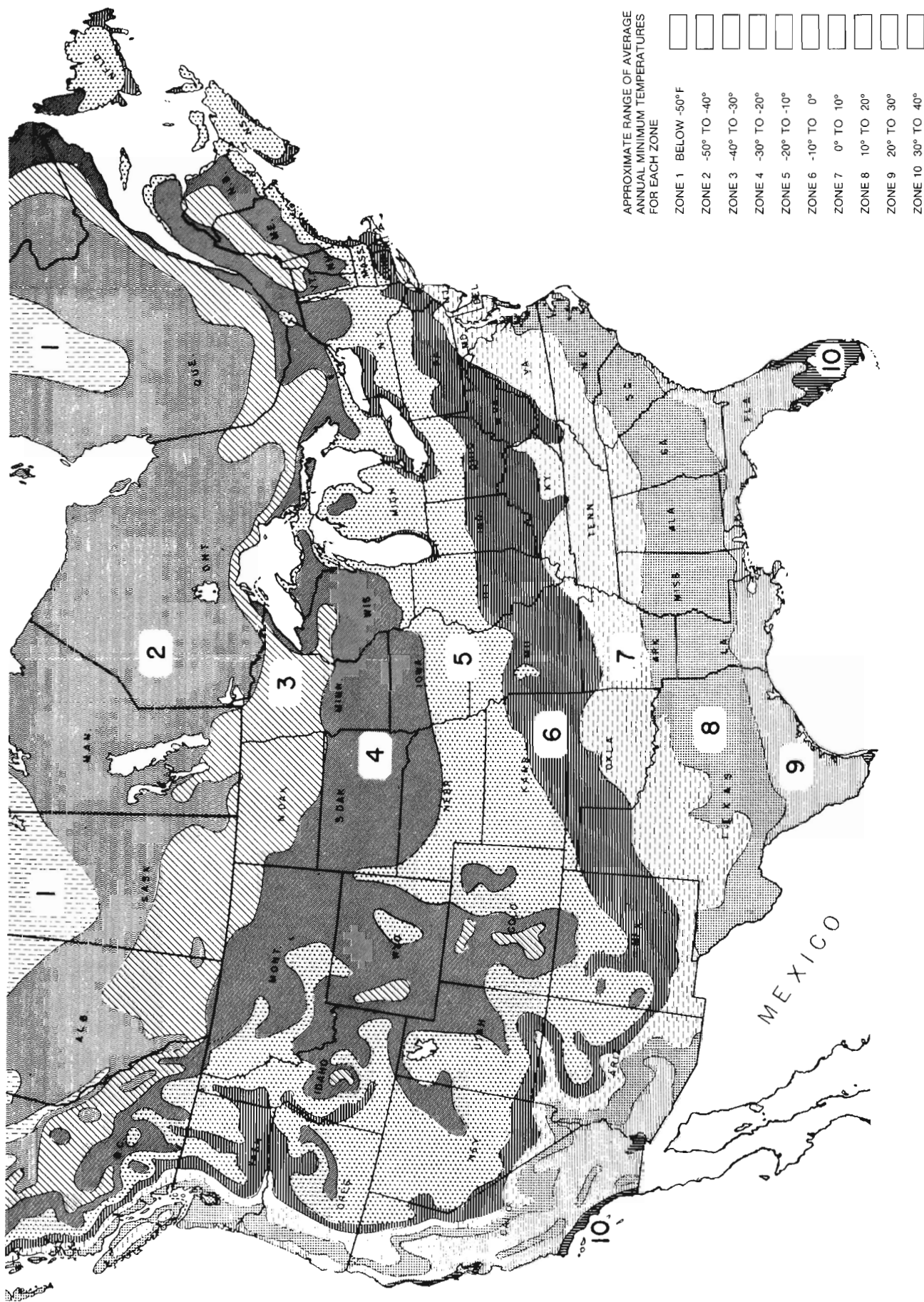
The following is a list of companies that sell ornamental grasses. No claim for completeness is intended since this is only a partial listing. It is given for convenience only and does not constitute an endorsement.

### Seed

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| Geo. W. Park Seed Company<br>Greenwood, SC 29647-0001<br>(864) 223-8555       | Thompson and Morgan<br>PO Box 1308<br>Jackson, NJ 08527<br>(908) 363-2225 |
| Prairie Moon Nursery<br>Rte. 3, Box 163<br>Winona, MN 55987<br>(507) 452-1362 |   |

### Plants

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| Kurt Bluemel, Inc.<br>2740 Greene Lane<br>Baldwin, MD 21013<br>(410) 557-7229                  | Prairie Nursery<br>PO Box 306<br>Westfield, WI 53964<br>(608) 296-3679                        |
| Carroll Gardens<br>444 East Main St.<br>PO Box 310<br>Westminster, MD 21157<br>(410) 876-7336  | Andre Viette Farm and<br>Nursery<br>RD #1, Box 16<br>Fishersville, VA 22939<br>(703) 943-7315 |
| Limerock Ornamental<br>Grasses<br>RD #1, Box 111-C<br>Port Matilda, PA 16870<br>(814) 692-2272 | Wayside<br>Hodges, SC 29695-0001<br>1 (800) 845-1124  |



The zones of plant hardiness (from *Plant Hardiness Zone Map*, Agricultural Research Service, USDA, Mis. Pub. No. 814, Gov. Print Off., Washington, D.C.)

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*Panicum virgatum* 'Strictum' 10  
*Pennisetum alopecuroides* 10  
*Pennisetum alopecuroides* 'Hameln' 10  
*Pennisetum ruppelii* 10  
*Pennisetum setaceum* 10  
*Pennisetum villosum* 11  
*Phalaris arundinacea* 'Picta' 11  
*Phalaris canariensis* 13  
*Phleum pratensis* 13  
*Polypogon monspeliensis* 13  
*Rhynchelytrum repens* 11  
*Schizachyrium scoparius* 12  
*Sesleria caerulea* 12  
*Setaria italica* 13  
*Setaria palmifolia* 'Variegata' 13  
*Sitanion hystrix* 13  
*Sorghastrum nutans* 12  
*Spartina pectinata* 'Aureo-marginata' 11  
*Stipa gigantea* 12  
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