



ORNAMENTAL GRASSES

JUST FRUITS & EXOTICS

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INTRODUCTION

As you drive the scenic local byways and highways, notice more carefully the increasing utilization of beautiful ornamental grasses in both public and private landscaping. As well as being aesthetically pleasing, most are easy to maintain, adaptable to extremes of weather and soil, and free of most insect and disease problems. Their drought tolerance and minimal need for fertilizers makes them more sensitive to the natural environment than many other perennials. (Remember the current buzzword for landscaping, "Florida Friendly".) Adding year-round interest with their changing forms or their graceful architectural textures, they often attract wildlife, help control erosion, or perform other useful functions.

USES IN THE LANDSCAPE

You may be surprised at the variety of uses for grasses. The shorter ones, such as Nana lily turf (*Ophiopogon japonicus*), soft *Carex* types, *Liriope*, *Lomandra*, etc. are famously used as borders. Some of the more unusual or striking, such as Aztec Variegated Grass (*O. intermedius*) or Red Fountain Grass (*Pennisetum setaceum*) make fine accent plants among annuals and perennial beds, serving as punctuation marks. Or consider a small mass of soft little sedges, *Carex albula*, especially contrasted with vivid burgundy or lime green taro or sweet potato vines. It goes without saying that a small patch of short ornamental grass in a container planting will often soften the edges and add variety and texture.

Medium height grasses (to about 3'), such as Muhly (an excellent native grass), crown grass, or zebra grass are most effectively used as accents among shrubs, annuals or perennials. In addition they can serve as a short screen for a sitting area, providing the music of rustling foliage and a little wind block. In large-scale landscape schemes, they make stately masses or linear definitions. (See an example of this in the parallel flanks of crown grass (*Paspalum quadrifarium*) and bear grass (*Yucca filamentosa*) in front of the Inn at Wildwood Golf Course just east of us on highway 98.) Fountain grasses such as Red Fountain Grass (*Pennisetum setaceum*) or Black-Flowering Fountain Grass (*P. alopecuroides*) are frequently used in this way with a lovely effect. Lemon Grass (*Cymbopogon citratis*), is fragrant and useful as an herb. (Here at Just Fruits we always like to encourage edible landscaping!)

In the taller family of grasses (above 3'), you will find Pampas (*Cortaderis selloana*) and its several varieties, including Silver Comet (white stripe on green) and Gold Band (gold stripe on green). Most of us have seen pampas used as stately sentinels at a driveway entrance, for example. It also makes an effective and dense hedge or screen. Just be sure to give it breathing room. *Miscanthus sinensis* and its many offshoots are a hardy and beautiful bunch. They include Cabaret and Cosmopolitan, both broad-leafed and white-and-green striped, and Porcupine Grass, (*Miscanthus sin. stricta*), all of which offer striking color and pattern as well as toughness and adaptability. Tall grasses make an interesting and graceful vertical element in the scene, softening harsh vertical lines of structures or creating a transition between different garden areas. The giants of the tall grasses are the bamboos, which require a special place in the scenery. The best will be the clumpers (running bamboos can be too rampant!) and they can make a stunning impact in the right setting, some reaching as tall as 25' or more, with thick, beautifully colored stalks.

Your decision as to which grass to choose will greatly depend upon the site you choose, whether you prefer an evergreen or deciduous look, and the environmental needs of the particular grass. Visit the nursery to see some of the many possibilities (many of which are planted in our permanent gardens surrounding the parking lot), and consider their changing forms as the seasons change. At the end of this article you will find a list some of the species we typically have in stock at any given time. Do a little research (Google!) and get a sense of their various characteristics. You're sure to find one or more that will fit your plans and budget.

PLANTING AND CULTURE

SITE SELECTION

As mentioned above, site will depend upon the grass chosen, and vice versa. Most are quite adaptable with respect to soil and water needs, but the majority prefers full sun. You will want to consider its function in your setting (see "Uses in the Landscape," above and the chart on the last page) for its ultimate size and form. Think about whether you need a creeping (running or spreading) grass to cover a larger area (or to hang from a container). Some of these may need boundaries, such as sidewalks. Others, such as Blue Dune Grass (*Leymus arenarius*), or Cord grass (*Spartina patens*) may fill a need for an erosion control and/or a highly salt tolerant, xeric (drought tolerant) choice as well.

SOIL PREPARATION, PLANTING, AND WATERING

Many of the grasses are extremely easy to maintain once established, and require minimal irrigation and fertilizer. This is why they are considered so friendly to the environment. However, it will take several weeks to establish them to the point of drought tolerance. If your soil is pure sand, it never hurts to enrich the planting hole with an appropriate soil amendment. When in doubt, use a balanced neutral commercial mix. Dig a planting hole approximately three times the width of the pot and at the same depth as the root ball. Mix your soil amendment with the soil dug from the hole (50:50 mix). The grass should be placed into the hole and the roots firmly covered. Do not plant too deeply or bury the crown. Water thoroughly, to settle the roots and eliminate air pockets. Watering should be done with drip irrigation if possible, reducing the chance of foliage diseases. After several weeks, when well-established, most will only need water when very dry.

After mid-summer, most grasses slow down the growth of their roots considerably, and transplanting becomes more difficult. It is easier to get your grass well-established and looking good if done earlier in the season (early spring). This also gives it more time to establish some

drought tolerance, a crucial factor in its ultimate toughness. However, you can plant them year-round with good success as long as they receive enough water for the first crucial month or two, especially when the weather is excessively dry.

FERTILIZATION

Fertilization requirements for the majority of grasses are minimal (they're Florida Friendly!). One application of fertilizer in the early spring, as growth begins, is enough to carry the grass through the entire growing season. Excessive fertilizer results in weak, floppy growth of both the foliage and the flower stalks of grasses. Fertilizer should be applied just prior to spring, when rapid growth would be expected.

The types of grasses whose foliage is cut to the ground in early spring for rejuvenation will need a fairly balanced application (for example, Epsoma Plant-Tone, 5-3-3, which has that low phosphate middle number that we need to strive for here in naturally high-phosphorus Florida) at 1-2 pounds per 100 square feet (applied at the time of foliage removal) to compensate for the nutrients lost with the defoliation. For individual grasses, we calculate that this might translate to approximately $\frac{1}{4}$ cup of fertilizer for each one foot in height of the grass.

PRUNING AND MANAGING

Pruning of grasses that need it (deciduous ones, such as *Miscanthus*) should be done in late winter or very early spring. Remember that the winter form of the grass is one of its charms, and the dried foliage and gracefully waving seed heads will be beautiful (and musical) in their own way. The pruning is done by completely removing the old foliage, to about 2-5" above the soil. For evergreen grasses (Crown Grass, for example) it is only necessary to remove the ragged, dead tips or old flower stalks and seed heads on an as-needed basis. It is also possible to burn the dead thatch out of the crowns in late with a butane torch. Be sure to do this before the growth begins in the spring.

It is seldom necessary to divide the grass clumps. However, if a grass (especially a *Pennisetum*, *Miscanthus*, or *Panicum*) becomes less vigorous as it ages, or begins to die out in the center, it is often a sign of overcrowding. It is easy to dig and divide them (as with all clumping plants) and they will quickly rejuvenate. This should be done in spring before growth resumes, or in late summer or fall, after the growing season is finished.

EVERGREEN GRASSES FOR SCREENS

TALL SCREENS

Bamboo

SHORT SCREENS

Bamboo Muhly Pampas Grass

Sand Cord Grass

GRASSES FOR LOW GROUND COVERS

Cerulean Flax Lily

Blue Dune Grass

Mondo Grass

Variegated Ribbon Grass

Muhly Grass

Quaking Grass

Evergold Carex

Elliott's Love Grass

FS = Full Sun

PS = Part Sun

SH = Shade

COMMON NAME	BOTANICAL NAME	MATURE HEIGHT AND SPACING	SUN	NATIVE	EVER-GREEN	DRY-SOIL	SALT TOLERANCE
Alphonse Karr Bamboo	<i>Bambusa glaucescens</i>	25-35 ft. tall Space 6-15 ft.	FS PS	No	Yes	Yes	Moderate Salt
Fernleaf Bamboo	<i>Bambusa glaucescens</i>	15-20 ft. tall Space 6-15 ft.	FS PS	No	Yes	Yes	Moderate Salt
Silver Stripe Bamboo	<i>Bambusa glaucescens</i>	25-35 ft. tall Space 6-15 ft.	FS PS	No	Yes	Yes	Moderate Salt
Buddha's Belly Bamboo	<i>Bambusa Glaucescens</i>	25-40 ft. tall Space 6-15 ft.	FS PS	No	Yes	Yes	Moderate Salt
Golden Goddess Bamboo	<i>Bambusa Glaucescens</i>	10-15 ft. tall Space 6-15 ft.	FS PS	No	Yes	Yes	Moderate Salt
Quaking Grass	<i>Briza media</i>	18-24 in. tall Space 1-2 ft.	FS PS	No	No	Yes	Low Salt
Feather Reed Grass	<i>Calamagrostis</i>	4-5 ft. tall Space 2-3 ft.	FS PS	No	No	Yes	Low Salt
Leatherleaf Sedge	<i>Carex buchananii</i>	12-18 in. tall Space 1-2 ft.	FS PS	No	Yes	Yes	Low Salt
Toffee Twist Sedge	<i>Carex flagellifera</i>	2 ft. tall Space 1-2 ft.	FS PS	No	Yes	Yes	Low Salt
Evergold Sedge	<i>Carex oshimensis</i>	10-12 in. tall Space 6-24 in.	PS SH	No	Yes	Yes	Low Salt
Upland Sea Oats	<i>Chasmanthium latifolium</i>	3 ft. tall Space 1-3 ft.	FS PS	No	Yes	No	High Salt
Gold Band Pampas Grass	<i>Cortaderia selloana</i>	3-4 ft. tall Space 2-4 ft.	FS PS	No	Yes	Yes	High Salt
Silver Comet Pampas Grass	<i>Cortaderia selloana</i>	5-6 ft. tall Space 2-5 ft.	FS PS	No	Yes	Yes	High Salt
Pampas Grass	<i>Cortaderis selloana</i>	6-10 ft. tall Space 4-8 ft.	FS PS	No	Yes	Yes	High Salt
Lemon Grass	<i>Cymbopogon citratus</i>	3 ft. tall Space 1-3 ft.	FS PS	No	No	Yes	Low Salt
Cerulean Flax Lily	<i>Dianella caerulea</i>	1-2 ft. tall Space 18-24 in.	PS SH	No	Yes	Yes	Moderate Salt
Blue Dune Grass	<i>Elymus arenarius</i>	3-4 ft. tall Space 1-2 ft.	FS PS	No	Yes	Yes	High Salt
Fiber Optic Grass	<i>Isolepis cernus</i>	12-16 in. tall Space 6-18 in.	FS PS	No	Yes	No	Moderate Salt
Porcupine Grass	<i>Miscanthus sinensis</i>	2-3 ft. tall Space 1-3 ft.	Full Sun	No	No	Yes	Moderate Salt
Adagio Grass	<i>Miscanthus sinensis</i>	3-4 ft. tall Space 2-4 ft.	Full Sun	No	No	Yes	Moderate Salt
Cabaret Maiden Grass	<i>Miscanthus sinensis</i>	6-7 ft. tall Space 2-6 ft.	Full Sun	No	No	Yes	Moderate Salt
Cosmopolitan Grass	<i>Miscanthus sinensis</i>	6-8 ft. tall Space 2-6 ft.	Full Sun	No	No	Yes	Moderate Salt
Gracillimus Grass	<i>Miscanthus sinensis</i>	6-8 ft. tall Space 2-6 ft.	Full Sun	No	No	Yes	Moderate Salt
Silver Feather Grass	<i>Miscanthus sinensis</i>	4-6 ft. tall Space 2-6 ft.	Full Sun	No	No	Yes	Moderate Salt
Yaku Jima Grass	<i>Miscanthus sinensis</i>	3-4 ft. tall Space 2-4 ft.	Full Sun	No	No	Yes	Moderate Salt
Zebra Grass	<i>Miscanthus sinensis zebrinus</i>	5-7 ft. tall Space 2-6 ft.	Full Sun	No	No	Yes	Moderate Salt
Muhly Grass	<i>Muhlenbergia capilaris</i>	3-4 ft. tall Space 2-4 ft.	FS PS	Yes	Yes	Yes	Moderate Salt
Bamboo Muhly Grass	<i>Muhlenbergia dumosa</i>	6-8 ft. tall Space 2-6 ft.	FS PS SH	No	Yes	Yes	Moderate Salt
Mexican Feather Grass	<i>Nasella tenuissima</i>	24-30 in. tall Space 6-24 in.	FS PS	No	Yes	Yes	Moderate Salt
Mondo Grass	<i>Ophiopogon japonicus</i>	2-4 in. tall Space 2-6 in.	PS SH	No	Yes	Yes	High Salt
Crown Grass	<i>Paspalum quadrifarium</i>	3 ft. tall Space 1-3 ft.	FS PS	No	Yes	Yes	High Salt
Black-Flowering Fountain Grass	<i>Pennisetum alopecuroides</i>	3 ft. tall Space 1-3 ft.	Full Sun	No	No	Yes	Moderate Salt
White Fountain Grass	<i>Pennisetum alopecuroides</i>	4 ft. tall Space 2-4 ft.	Full Sun	No	No	Yes	Moderate Salt
Black Millet	<i>Pennisetum glaucum</i>	4-5 ft. tall Space 2-4 ft.	Full Sun	No	No	Yes	Moderate Salt
Red Buttons Fountain Grass	<i>Pennisetum messiacum</i>	2-3 ft. tall Space 1-3 ft.	Full Sun	No	No	Yes	Moderate Salt
Karley Rose Fountain Grass	<i>Pennisetum orientale</i>	2-3 ft. tall Space 1-3 ft.	FS PS	No	No	Yes	Moderate Salt
Oriental Fountain Grass	<i>Pennisetum orientale</i>	3-4 ft. tall Space 2-4 ft.	FS PS	No	No	Yes	Moderate Salt
Tall Tails Fountain Grass	<i>Pennisetum orientale</i>	3-4 ft. tall Space 2-4 ft.	FS PS	No	No	Yes	Moderate Salt
Red Fountain Grass	<i>Pennisetum setaceum</i>	3-4 ft. tall Space ft.	Full Sun	No	No	Yes	Moderate Salt
Variiegated Ribbon Grass	<i>Phalaris arundinacea</i>	18-24 in. tall Space 12-18 in.	PS SH	No	Yes	No	Moderate Salt
Sand Cordgrass	<i>Spartina bakeri</i>	3-5 ft. tall Space 2-4 ft.	Full Sun	Yes	Yes	Yes	High Salt
Saltmeadow Cordgrass	<i>Spartina patens</i>	1-3 ft. tall Space 1-2 ft.	Full Sun	Yes	Yes	Yes	High Salt
Tiger Grass	<i>Thysanoleana maxima</i>	10 ft. tall Space 6-8 ft.	Full Sun	No	No	Yes	Low Salt
Dwarf Fakahatchee Grass	<i>Tripsacum floridanum</i>	2-3 ft. tall Space 1-3 ft.	Full Sun	Yes	Yes	Yes	Low Salt
Sea Oats	<i>Uniola paniculata</i>	4-6 ft. tall Space 18-24 in.	Full Sun	Yes	Yes	Yes	High Salt

Grasses tender to freezes (Evergreen = No) must be replanted or protected at 27F and lower.