



About Ornamental Grasses

Feature	Details
Definition	Plants grown for their aesthetic value, offering unique textures, colors, and forms.
Key Varieties	Miscanthus, Fountain Grass, Pampas Grass, Switchgrass, and Feather Reed Grass.
Applications in Gardens	Great for texture, layering, privacy screens, and enhancing seasonal appeal.
Maintenance Requirements	Mostly low-maintenance; require occasional pruning or dividing for optimal growth and structure.
Garden Planning Tips	Assess layout, enhance with complementary plants, provide appropriate spacing, and plan for seasons.



Choosing The Right Grasses

Factor	Key Considerations
Climate Suitability	Match the grass species to your hardiness zone, temperature tolerance, and soil conditions.
Height and Seasonal Form	Consider grass heights for landscape functions (e.g., screens, borders) and seasonal interest for dynamic garden appeal.
Maintenance and Growth Habits	Choose grasses appropriate to your willingness to prune, divide, or control invasive growth to ensure ease of upkeep.
Additional Considerations	Align grass types with garden themes, explore functional roles like erosion control, and prioritize native or pollinator-friendly varieties for added ecological benefits.



Selecting Tall Ornamental Grasses

Grass Name	Height Range	Notable Features	USDA Zones
Feather Reed Grass ('Karl Foerster')	4–6 ft	Narrow, upright form; feathery reddish-brown to golden plumes; tolerates wet and dry soils	4–9
Porcupine Grass	Up to 8 ft	Upright with dark green leaves and striking horizontal gold bands; reddish-bronze summer plumes	4–9
Pampas Grass	6–10 ft	Large fluffy plumes, dense fountain-like clumps, drought tolerant, ideal for ornamental use	7–11
Switch Grass ('Northwind')	4–6 ft	Tall, vertical form with airy flower panicles; warm-season grass	4–9
Lord Snowden	4–8 ft	Clump-forming with large powder blue foliage and orange-red-tan summer blooms	4–10
Red October	5–6 ft	Narrow green leaves with red streaks turning burgundy and candy-apple red after frost	3–9
Big Bluestem	5–8 ft	Tall prairie grass with blue-green foliage turning red-orange in fall	3–9
Indian Grass	5–8 ft	Tall, warm-season grass with golden seed heads in late summer	3–9
Maiden Grass	4–7 ft	Tall, arching blades with showy silver-white plumes in late summer	5–9
Fountain Grass ('Hameln')	3–4 ft	Compact but can reach near 4 ft; arching flower spikes, long bloom season	5–9
Purple Fountain Grass	4–6 ft	Purplish-maroon foliage with rose-red plumes; drought tolerant but less cold hardy	8–11
Zebra Grass ('Strictus')	Up to 8 ft	Dark green leaves with horizontal gold stripes; upright habit	4–9
Morning Light Maiden Grass	6–7 ft	Variegated leaves with white margins; graceful arching habit	5–9
Silver Feather Grass	7 ft	Tall with silvery plumes and fine-textured foliage	4–9



Selecting Medium-Height Ornamental Grasses

Grass Name	Height	Bloom Time	Notable Features	USDA Zones
Pink Flamingo Muhly Grass	3–4 ft	Late summer to fall	Upright habit with bright pink, cotton-candy-like plumes	6–10
Blue Oat Grass	2–4 ft	Summer	Pale blue foliage, fine texture, graceful seed panicles	4–8
Fountain Grass ('Hameln')	3–4 ft	Summer to fall	Compact, arching flower spikes, long bloom season	5–9
Side Oats Gramma	2–3 ft	Summer	Mounding habit, green foliage with purple to red spikelets	4–9
Prairie Dropseed	2–3 ft	Late summer to fall	Fine-textured, fragrant seed heads, drought tolerant	4–9
Little Bluestem ('Jazz' or 'Standing Ovation')	2–4 ft	Late summer to winter	Blue-green foliage turning red-orange in fall, upright habit	3–9
Japanese Forest Grass	1–3 ft	Summer	Mounding, arching habit, golden variegated leaves; shade tolerant	5–9
'Karl Foerster' Feather Reed Grass	3–4 ft	Early summer	Upright, feathery plumes, multi-season interest	4–9
Blue Grama	1.5–2.5 ft	Summer	Low-growing, distinctive seed heads, drought tolerant	3–9
Mexican Feather Grass	2–3 ft	Summer	Fine, wispy texture, drought tolerant	6–10



Selecting Low-Height Ornamental Grasses

Grass Name	Height	Notable Features	USDA Zones
Blue Fescue	6–12 inches	Compact, neat blue-gray foliage; excellent for borders and rock gardens	4–8
Dwarf Mondo Grass	4–6 inches	Dense, dark green clumps, great for ground cover or edging	6–10
Everest Sedge	~10 inches	Fine-textured, mounding grass-like plant, shade tolerant	Varies
Chinese Fountain Grass	~18 inches	Blue-green foliage with soft pink or white flower spikes	5–9
Blonde Ambition Blue Grama	~1 foot	Blue-green foliage with horizontal seed heads that age to blonde	4–9
Little Bunny Feather Reed Grass	1 foot	Upright, narrow, compact form with early-season bloom	5–9
Hamel Dwarf Fountain Grass	2 feet	Compact, arching flower spikes, long bloom season	5–9
Blue Grama	1–2 feet	Warm-season native with decorative flaglike inflorescences	3–9



Selecting Ground and Border Filler Ornamental Grasses

Ground Filler	Height	Notable Features	USDA Zones
Dwarf Mondo Grass	4–6 inches	Dense, dark green clumps, spreads slowly, excellent ground cover	6–10
Liriope Muscari (monkey grass)	12–18 inches	Dense, grass-like foliage, purple flower spikes, shade tolerant, versatile ground cover	5-10
Everest Sedge	~10 inches	Fine-textured, mounding, shade tolerant, evergreen	Varies
Blue Grama	1–2 feet	Low-growing warm-season grass, good for erosion control	3–9
Mexican Feather Grass	1–2 feet	Fine, wispy texture, drought tolerant, often used as ground cover	6–10



Colorful Blooming Ornamental Grasses

Grass Name	Bloom Characteristics	Hardiness Zones	Height	Special Features
Mexican Feather Grass	Golden flower spikes	6 to 10	1-2 feet	Soft texture, adaptable, golden hues
Purple Fountain Grass	Burgundy foliage, feather plumes	9 to 11	3-4 feet	Dramatic, annual in colder climates
Indian Grass	Golden-bronze panicles	4 to 9	3-5 feet	Native species, pollinator-friendly
Pink Muhly Grass	Cotton-candy pink plumes	6 to 10	3-4 feet	Drought-tolerant, striking in masses
Miscanthus 'Morning Light'	Copperty-pink to creamy white plumes	4 to 9	4-5 feet	Variegated foliage, elegant backdrop



Design Strategies for Integrating Ornamental Grasses

Design Focus	Key Ideas	Example Applications	Supporting Sources
Structure and Rhythm	Create frameworks, guide visual pathways, alternate heights for rhythm	Pathway borders, privacy screens	University of Minnesota landscape research
Texture and Contrast	Combine fine and coarse textures for visual balance and biodiversity	Pair grasses with shrubs and perennials	American Society of Landscape Architects
Color and Seasonal Appeal	Year-round interest through seasonal changes in foliage and seed heads	Feather reed grass or switchgrass for fall color	Examples from botanical institutions
Sustainable and Functional Use	Improve soil health, infiltration, and carbon sequestration; adapt to low-water environments	Bioswales, rain gardens, erosion control	Sustainable Sites Initiative (SITES)
Ecological and Wildlife Value	Support pollinators, shelter birds, and reduce maintenance needs	Use native grass species to boost local biodiversity	USDA conservation and Plant Hardiness Zone recommendations



Best Practices for Care and Long-Term Success

Aspect	Best Practices
Planting and Establishment	Plant in well-draining soil, provide appropriate sunlight, space plants to avoid overcrowding, and ensure sufficient watering initially.
Seasonal Maintenance	Cut back old growth in late winter or early spring, apply mulch sparingly, and trim seed heads to control spread.
Managing Pests and Diseases	Inspect plants regularly, ensure proper air circulation, avoid overwatering, and remove diseased foliage swiftly.
Other Considerations	Divide clumps every 3-5 years to maintain plant health, protect crowns in winter climates, and adapt care to specific grass types.



Questions for Landscape Contractor

Key Question	Optional Grasses to Discuss
Which ornamental grass varieties would work best for my local climate and soil conditions?	Native grass species or drought-tolerant varieties such as Fountain Grass, Switchgrass, or Little Bluestem.
How can ornamental grasses be incorporated to enhance the overall aesthetic of my garden design?	Grasses with unique textures or colors like Purple Moor Grass, Zebra Grass, or Feather Reed Grass can provide contrast and visual interest.
What are the maintenance requirements for the recommended ornamental grasses?	Low-maintenance grasses like Blue Oat Grass or Muhly Grass may be suitable, requiring minimal pruning or fertilization.
Are there specific grasses that provide seasonal interest or year-round appeal?	Consider Miscanthus or Carex for year-round structure and Panicum species for fall color and seed heads.
How do ornamental grasses interact with existing plants and structures in my landscape?	Grasses such as Maiden Grass or Giant Miscanthus can complement shrubs and trees while defining spaces.
What is the expected growth rate and mature size of the selected grass species?	Smaller varieties like Elijah Blue Fescue are ideal for compact spaces, while Miscanthus giganteus suits larger areas.
Can ornamental grasses help with erosion control or other functional purposes?	Erosion control can be achieved with species like Switchgrass or Prairie Dropseed, which have deep root systems.
Are there any invasive grass species I should avoid using in my area?	Always research local regulations to avoid invasive types like Common Reed (Phragmites) or Pampas Grass in certain areas.
What irrigation or watering needs do these grasses typically require?	Drought-resistant grasses like Blue Grama may need less water, while others like Japanese Forest Grass require more frequent watering.
How can ornamental grasses be used to create privacy or define garden spaces?	Tall grasses like Pampas Grass or Giant Sacaton are excellent for creating live screens and natural privacy barriers.