

Ornamental Grasses

University of Idaho
Extension
Kootenai County
1250 W Ironwood, Ste 107
Coeur d'Alene, ID 83814

Phone: (208) 292-2525
Plant Clinic: (208) 292-1377
E-mail: kootenaimg@uidaho.edu
Web: uidaho.edu/kootenai



Grasses, grasses, grasses

I was so pleased with the color and texture of grasses that I am eager to try even more varieties. I am offering some new ones plus my favorites. I used them by the pond but will expand to other area of the gardens. Some had *absolutely outstanding* fall color.

my favorites - ! new this year.

Briza media (Quaking Grass), 2-3', sun, Z4.
Opalescent seed heads in spring and dry to a soft golden-brown. Excellent for dried arrangements.

Carex flagellifera (Copperleaf Sedge), 2-3', sun/psh, Z4. The colors of this graceful, flowing sedge range from burnished copper to straw to greenish brown with orange highlights.

Carex morrowii variegata (Japanese Silver Sedge), 1', Z5, sun/sh. Broad green leaves with creamy-white margins form an upright clump resembling yucca. Arching flower stems in spring create a striking effect. Rarely offered.

Helictotrichon sempervirens (Blue Oat Grass), 2-3', sun, Z4. Drought tolerant, semi-evergreen silver blue spiky foliage and 4' tan flower stems.

Milium effusum aureum (Bowles' Golden Grass), 1-2', psh, Z4. Incandescent chartreuse foliage lights up shady areas. Appealing informal structure and delicate stems. One of the best grasses for dry shade ground cover. Self-seeds.

Miscanthus purpurascens (Autumn Red Japanese Grass), 3-4', sun, Z4. A shorter miscanthus whose green leaves are transformed in autumn to iridescent colors.

! Carex muskingumensis (Palm Sedge), 2-3', psh/sh, Z4. Graceful pointed leaves radiate from upright stems creating a feathery effect.

! Deschampsia caepitosa 'Goldgehaenge' ("Gold Garland" Tufted hair Grass), 3', sun/psh, Z4. Shiny dark green foliage with large, dramatic golden yellow flowers.

! Festuca amethystina superba (Rainbow Fescue), 8-12", sun, Z4. Amethyst red highlights appear on this grass in spring. By summer the finely textured gray-blue stems look good all season.

! Miscanthus s. 'Sarabande', 4-5', sun, Z4. Shining silvery stripe fills the center of each narrow, dark green leaf. Bronze flower plumes in fall.

! Miscanthus s. var. strictus (Porcupine Grass), 6-8', sun, Z4. A multitude of horizontal gold bands highlight the light green leaves. Contrasting colors and a spiky, upright habit create a bold appearance.

Most are drought tolerant. Be brave and try some in your garden.

****Anonymous****

Late winter is prime time for trimming ornamental grasses

ABERDEEN, Idaho – With their graceful, slender leaves and waving seed heads, ornamental grasses add a special touch to the winter landscape – especially on foggy, frosty days. But there comes a time in late winter when most ornamental grasses benefit from being trimmed back to within 3-4 inches off the ground.

“Ornamental grasses keep landscapes looking alive and dynamic throughout the winter, and their stems and foliage provide their crown or growing points with some protection from the ice and cold,” says Tom Salaiz, University of Idaho turfgrass specialist at Aberdeen. However, once the first signs of new growth become apparent – or even just beforehand – cutting grasses back helps warm their crowns and speed spring growth. Not only does an annual trim remove the old, shabby stems that have started to break and topple, but it frees the vigorous new growth from the need to compete with the old growth for light and space.

Some evergreen grasses – such as *Luzula*, or wood rushes, and *Carex*, or sedges – can remain attractive for several years without a trim, Salaiz says. Simply comb through the foliage – either with your fingers or with a gently wielded rake – to remove any old foliage.

When cutting the others – especially *Miscanthus* and *Cortaderia* – suit up with gloves and a long-sleeved shirt or jacket to protect yourself from sharp leaf margins. Using a decomposable string like cotton or even masking tape, tie the leaves of taller grasses together before you start cutting. “Then you can just dump the entire bundle into your compost pile,” Salaiz says, “although you’ll probably want to chop the taller stems and leaves into smaller pieces to help them decompose.”

As for your tools of choice, Salaiz recommends hand pruners for smaller grasses and manual hedge shears for larger ones, although a bow saw comes in handy with such thick-stemmed grasses as *Miscanthus*. If your yard includes broad expanses of grassy groundcover, an electric or gas hedge trimmer may be your best bet. But Salaiz is less-enthusiastic about power string trimmers as grass-trimming tools. “They create quite a mess and leave a need for unnecessary cleanup,” he says.

Happy trimming!