

Designing with Ornamental Grasses

Grasses work well in many landscapes and types of gardens including – around patios, pools, water gardens and ponds, in Japanese and rock gardens, in containers and xeriscape gardens or in areas where irrigation is lacking.

- Two elements that grasses are uniquely known for is adding movement and sound to gardens.
- Grasses can serve as ground cover, specimen plants, erosion control, screening and vertical design elements providing height and visual depth to the garden.
- Most grasses require three to five hours of full sun each day to grow and bloom.
- Many add vertical presence and interest in garden beds especially after most perennials lose their foliage in the fall. Dried foliage and seed heads persist through winter and add season-long interest.
- Grasses work well against dark backgrounds. Light green and variegated foliage catches morning or evening sunlight to brighten dark locations.
- Some types of grasses will spread while others are clump forming. Check before selecting and planting.
- Annual types will need to be planted each year. Many can be easily grown from seed.



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Ornamental Grasses for your Garden

Ornamental grasses are getting the recognition they rightfully deserve, and now we can say that grasses are here to stay.

While we have all seen grasses being used in commercial areas and public spaces for some time, they are finally making their way into home gardens. Grasses have much to offer in terms of good garden design. They are a diverse alternative plant choice and include not only true grasses but close relatives such as sedges, rushes and bamboos. They add color, height, texture, movement and even sound to the garden.

Some things to know about ornamental grasses...

- Low maintenance – requiring only one cutting per year, if at all.
- Most are perennial and will return year after year; however some are annual and will not.
- Come in many heights, colors, and textures.
- Although not the showy flowers associated with garden flowers or shrubs, their seed heads and foliage provide summer, fall and winter interest.
- Provide decorative uses indoors in fresh cut and dried arrangements.

Although they are easy to grow, careful choices should be made for your site selection. Pay special attention to size, soil type and sunlight. Most grasses are tolerant of average soil conditions and prefer full sun but only a few adapt well to very wet or dry soils or shade. After being established, natural rainfall or minimal watering is all they need to thrive for many years.

Planting Ornamental Grasses

1. Ornamental grasses can be planted anytime; however, spring and fall are the best times.
2. Dig hole as deep as container and twice as wide.
3. Mix organic matter into soil for backfilling if existing soil is very sandy or has a lot of clay in it.
4. Remove plant from container and loosen roots a little.
5. Set plant in hole at same depth it was growing in the container; back fill under and around roots firming soil as needed to secure plant.
6. Water well after planting and continue watering for a few weeks following planting if rainfall is lacking.
7. Use an all-natural fertilizer such as PlantSure plus Mycorrhiza – this will get your new plants off to a great start without the potential harmful effects of a high-salt chemical fertilizer.

Caring for Ornamental Grasses

- Fertilize in spring as new growth appears with a high nitrogen organic fertilizer like Milorganite.
- Water grasses deeply once a week during hot dry weather; otherwise natural rainfall is sufficient the rest of the year for established plantings.
- Apply a 2-3 inch layer of organic mulch around grasses to conserve moisture and prevent weed growth.
- Many grasses are enjoyed for their dried foliage through winter. Cut down to ground level just before new growth begins in spring or for a neater look. If you wish, they may be cut back in late fall or early winter. *Note: dried foliage is combustible during winter and might be best removed near structures or in public areas for safety.*
- If needed, perennial grasses are best dug and divided or transplanted in spring.
- Ornamental grasses have few, if any pest problems. If aphids or mites should appear, spraying with a strong stream of water or an appropriately labeled organic insecticide will easily control the problem.



You'll need these:

- Compost, Peat Moss or Coir
- Espoma Plant-Tone
- Mulch
- Garden hose
- PlantSure plus Mycorrhiza



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05/07