

# ENHANCE YOUR LANDSCAPE WITH *Ornamental Grasses*

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*Purple Fountain Grass in turquoise pot*

Ornamental grasses are used in so many gardens now and are popular in both meadow type plantings, in low maintenance yards, and in mixed borders. Their ornamental value includes the plant shape and size, the form, color and texture of the leaves (blades), and the feature of their attractive seedheads (flowers). Many are drought tolerant, which is bonus in our changing climate. Even though they are generally called ornamental grasses, there are different botanical classifications for grass-like plants from which to choose.

Adding ornamental grasses to a garden or landscape can be both useful as well as beautiful. For instance, tall grasses can be used to create privacy, block unwanted views, and divide garden spaces. Shorter grasses are useful in defining and softening paths, walkways, and other hardscapes, providing ground cover and stabilizing slopes.

Ornamental grasses can be planted in groups and as single specimens. Several different ornamental grasses, having similar cultural needs, can be combined to create vignettes showcasing various colors, textures, sizes, and peak bloom time.

Beds and borders of trees, shrubs and/or perennials benefit, too, from the addition of ornamental grasses. They

can create focal points, provide definition to edges, add layers, texture, color, and movement.

Don't forget, grasses can be grown in containers, too. Mix them with plants that like the same growing conditions, or plant one in a pot by itself. A combination that looks good is purple fountain grass (*Pennisetum setaceum* 'Rubrum') in a tall turquoise pot.

A once-a-year grooming is generally all that is needed to keep ornamental grasses looking good. For those varieties that turn brown in winter, leave them until early spring and then cut down all the leaves close to the ground before new growth begins. For those varieties that keep their color through the winter, just tidy them up in spring by removing dead, or disfigured leaves with a gloved hand or rake.

There is an ornamental grass selection for every garden style, contemporary to cottage, and most growing conditions, wet to dry. Landscape design expert, Michael McCoy, suggests that if you are including ornamental grasses in a garden bed, strive for a mix of about 30% grasses with other plants to achieve a pleasing, naturalistic effect. In our gardens, we've both grown several kinds of ornamental grasses.

## CINDY'S RECOMMENDATIONS:

### **Feather Reed Grass 'Karl Foerster'** **(*Calamagrostis acutiflora* 'Karl Foerster')**

This grass has a statuesque, upright presence in the landscape. The tall spikes of golden seed heads rise about the green leaves for a wonderful two-tone effect as the grass waves gently in the breeze. It's a very popular grass and can be seen all around Clark County. It grows to 6' tall and about 3' wide.

### **New Zealand Sedge Frosted Curly** **(*Carex comans* 'Frosted Curly')**

Thin blades of silvery green end in a twist on this softly mounding grass look-alike. Growing to about one foot tall,

several plants placed close together form a lovely groundcover or ribbon at the edge of a bed or border. Used as a spiller in a container Frosted Curly will add a soft touch to bolder companion plants.

### **Tufted Hair Grass** **(*Deschampsia cespitosa* 'Pixie Fountain')**

This selection of a native grass forms an 18"-24" mound of dark green leaves. In summer, numerous stems of gold, silver, purple and green seedheads rise above to form a cloud-like apparition. Tufted hair grass is one of a few grasses that will grow in shade as well as sun.



*Feather Reed Grass 'Karl Foerster'*

## JOANNE'S RECOMMENDATIONS:



Japanese Forest Grass  
'Aureola'

Black Mondo Grass

### Japanese Forest Grass (*Hakonechloa macra* 'Aureola')

The lime green color and habit of low arching mounds makes it a standout. It gradually makes a larger mound that will arch beautifully and make a bright statement at the edge of the garden bed. About 2' tall, 3' wide. It's a perennial, but if you leave the foliage on the plant, it can be quite nice to have the dry tan foliage in the landscape during the winter. Plant in light shade.

### Japanese Sedge (*Carex morrowii* 'Ice Dance')

This plant can take the heavy clay-like soil and grows quickly to form a thick clump. I like the white and green variegation on the spiked foliage and the unique tan seed heads which cover the clump in late spring. It's beautiful in a mixed border. I recommend that you dig it up and divide it regularly to keep it from overtaking the garden. It grows 1' tall and 3' wide.



Lily Turf



### Black Mondo Grass (*Ophiopogon planiscapus* 'Nigrescens')

It is a small little plant that blooms purple and puts on tiny dark berries. You can't really say its evergreen, because it stays black. In deep shade, it can show some green leaves. Put it up against something colorful or tuck it into a pot. I like it up against a coral colored heuchera. It will form a 6" tall x 6" wide slowly spreading clump.



Japanese Blood Grass

### Purple Fountain Grass (*Pennisetum setaceum* 'Rubrum')

It has wonderful dark purple foliage that arches up and over the edges all summer, and then send up purplish-brown bottle brush spikes that wave and move in the wind. It can grow up to 5' tall and 3' wide. Since it's a tropical ornamental grass, it doesn't survive the first frost in Clark County. It's so beautiful, though, that it is worth investing in it annually, and it is readily found in local nurseries.

Japanese Sedge 'Ice Dance'

### BOTH OF US LIKE

#### Fountain Grass 'Burgundy Bunny' (*Pennisetum alopecuroides* 'Burgundy Bunny')

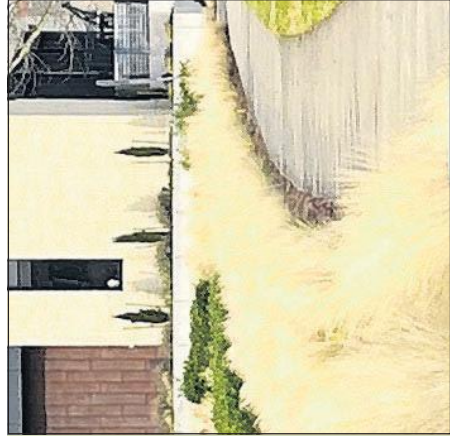
It is late to emerge but is a real beauty for its burgundy tints mixed in the with the green narrow foliage on a little mounding tuft. It produces late season cream-colored plumes of seed heads that rise above the intense burgundy foliage. 1' tall, 2' wide. It is a perennial fountain grass suitable for our climate.



Fountain Grass  
'Burgundy Bunny'

#### Great Plant Picks, a website that recommends outstanding plants for the maritime Pacific Northwest, also suggests:

- Golden Oats Grass (*Stipa gigantea*), a drought tolerant grass with seed heads that soar to 6 to 8' tall in early summer and resemble a mini field of oats.
- Dwarf Maiden Grass 'Adagio' (*Miscanthus sinensis* 'Adagio'), a 3' tall and wide softly mounding grass with arching feathery seed heads in late summer.
- Blue Oat Grass (*Helictotrichon sempervirens*), a two-foot-tall mound of steely blue foliage that persists year-round and tolerates dry conditions.



### WE DON'T RECOMMEND

**Pampas Grass (*Cortaderia selloana*)** This forms a huge, tall clump with feather duster like plumes. It's almost impossible to remove and is considered invasive in many states.

*There are hundreds of options to try. Choose a few and you will surely see why ornamental grasses have become so popular.*

### Ornamental Grasses Shine in Winter, Too

If you drive around Clark County, you'll notice that many landscapes now include ornamental grasses. One of our favorite views that highlight ornamental grasses is in Vancouver on SE Mill Plain Blvd between 172nd and 192nd Streets. Both side of the street have been planted in drifts of grasses that sway with the breeze and provide structure and color in summer and in winter. Shown here is ponytail grass, (*Stipa tenuissima*) in winter.