

Spring Care of Ornamental Grasses

What is an ornamental grass?

Ornamental grasses are a diverse group of popular annual or perennial landscape plants either in the true grass family or from “grasslike” families (rushes and sedges). Their growth forms include both clumping and spreading habits, and are characterized by low, intermediate and large heights, representing overall mature shapes from mounding, to rounded, to narrow or hedge-like. Even more diverse are their adaptations to habitats, conditions and climates – so options are plentiful for selecting ornamental grasses for your garden project.

Site Selection, Planting and Care

Although they vary considerably in their soil, light and water requirements, ornamental grasses still require appropriate site preparation (soil pH and fertility) and light requirements, just like any plant, for optimal results. Plant no deeper than the top of the rootball at the soil line to prevent root rot, and water well (drip irrigation is best) until established, then as needed thereafter (especially during dormancy). To preserve the decorative value of the flower heads, allow the stalks to remain until early spring. Prune then, prior to new foliar growth, then not again (unless for invasive control for spreading varieties) until the following spring. Don’t over-fertilize; generally, light application of a general purpose fertilizer is all that is needed.

How Are Ornamental Grasses Used In The Landscape?

Ornamental grasses are often used in the landscape for textural interest, given the arresting seasonal impact of foliar color, variegation and flower display. Larger varieties can be planted in drifts for a striking statement, or as a natural backdrop for blooming plants. Intermediate growers work well as decorative individual specimens, bold interrupters in a flowering bed, or as textural fillers in foundation plantings. Small or compact grasses soften walkways as a low-maintenance edging, or can even be used as ground cover. Often, grasses supply the vertical “thrill” in the “thrill, fill, spill” formula for container gardens. And backyard wildlife will enjoy an all-season prairie habitat created by a natural blend of ornamental grasses and native wildflowers.

An easy choice for Oklahoma gardens, ornamental grasses are widely available and can be planted in the spring. They are a low maintenance, versatile and diverse option for the creative gardener.

Oklahoma Proven Winners

Mexican Feather Grass *Nassella tenuissima*

Purple Fountain Grass *Pennisetum setaceum 'Rubrum'*

<http://oklahomaproven.okstate.edu/book.pdf>

Drought-tolerant Plant Selections for Oklahoma E-1037

<http://osufacts.okstate.edu/docushare/dsweb/Get/Document-9103/E-1037.pdf>

An Introduction to Ornamental Grasses and Grasslikes for Southern Gardeners

<http://wfrec.ifas.ufl.edu/Subsites/OrnamentalGrasses/>