

Landscaping with Ornamental Grasses

One of the most versatile plants you can place in your landscape is an ornamental grass. The myriad shapes, sizes and colors are virtually endless and their year-round beauty makes them a wise choice to enhance your landscape. Determining whether to select perennials or annuals, their watering needs and which are best for our zone is easier than you may think. Follow these tips, to ensure success in your landscape:

Select for Privacy and Shielding Unpleasant Views: A picture-perfect solution for displaying grasses is to choose tall species. Select a beautiful Bluestem grass that reaches 6 feet or more or the Ravenna grass that towers more than 12 feet. Bear in mind that during late winter/early spring you'll have to trim ornamental grasses and lose your privacy and/or unsightly views for about two months while your grasses regain their height.

Jazz up Your Patio or Deck: Ornamental grasses aren't restricted to in-ground planting for beds and borders. They are just as attractive in containers and add drama to decks and patios. Consider purple fountain grass in a container to add color and beautiful plumes. Fiber Optic grass is a great option against a plain wall. Try pairing it with contrasting colors. For example, blues planted in yellow pots. Because they are annuals, you will need to replace them in the spring.

Add Texture to Beds and Borders: To get the biggest bang for your buck and efforts try incorporating soft, mounding grasses to your borders. Fountain grass is a great companion to other border plants. Blue Oats grass is also mounding and enriches the landscape with a soft and alluring color. Another option is an upright Switch Grass that combines texture and color. Look for Miscanthus, coupled with black-eyed Susan, hydrangea and lavender.

Plant a Knot Garden: Try stepping out of your comfort zone and design a tight, mounding grass garden using herbs, boxwoods and grasses. The focus is the geometric design that these three plant materials provide. Think about adding additional interest with a Golden Sedge (however, mounding grasses work best). Grasses that are too loose and open can make the "Knot Garden" - they can appear somewhat messy because of their loose growth habit.

Create Garden Art: Ornamental grasses can serve as the perfect complement to sculpture. Feather grass provides an intriguing foil to broken pottery sculptures and lamb's ears. The effect is a contemporary design that will look great all year long. Don't shy away from using broken pottery to create a dramatic effect.

Attract wildlife: Birds use the leaf blades to make a nest in larger grasses and a number of species eat the grass seeds. If your goal is to attract birds, plant grasses native to our Hardiness Zone of 6b/7a.

Grow a Prairie: A meadow or prairie is doable with grasses. Ornamental grasses provide the tough structure and low maintenance required for an environmentally friendly landscape, adding natural beauty. For optimal success, make certain to select plants that are native to our region.

There are so many more options including: tucking ornamental grasses in your vegetable garden with reed grass, smothering weeds with mounding ground covering grasses and creating visual interest with formal grasses such as big Blue stem and Feather Reed Grass.

After three seasons, consider maximizing your efforts. Use a sharp shovel and break each specimen into clumps and spread across other areas of your landscape. In this manner, you will divide and conquer!