



Ornamental Grass Pruning

Ornamental grasses are a great addition to any landscape and provide texture, height and interest in all seasons. In addition, these grasses are easy to care for and maintain, and include many hardy varieties suitable for any climate. Enjoying ornamental grasses comes with little maintenance to give the plant its best chance to thrive and produce a healthy, beautiful plant for the landscape. Pruning ornamental grasses can seem like a huge task, but there are ways to simplify the process.

Before pruning ornamental grass, the type of grass needs to be determined. There are cool season grasses and warm season grasses. Observing the growth habit of your plant will help in deciding which grass is in the landscape.

Cool-season ornamental grass begins to produce new growth quite early in the spring, soon after temperatures begin to stay above freezing. Cool-season grasses flower by early summer, making it a beautiful addition to your landscape earlier in the season. Examples of cool season grasses include Phalaris and Stipa.

Warm-season grasses begin to grow much later in the spring, sometimes so late it may seem they did not make it through winter. Warm-season grasses begin flowering later in the summer, providing beautiful foliage well into the fall. Examples of warm season grasses include Miscanthus, Pennisetum and Saccharum.

After determining the grass type and hopefully watching it flourish, it's time to prune or "cut back" the dead foliage. So, let's discuss the easiest way to prune ornamental grass as well as when it is the best time of year to prune.

The best method to prune large grasses is to use a bungee cord or rope to wrap around the base of the grass. Secure it tightly and use loppers, a hedge trimmer or cutting shears to cut below the rope or bungee cord. This pruning procedure

will allow an even trim across the bottom of the grass as well as a quick clean up after trimming.

If you have a cool-season grass, it can be cut back in February. Waiting too long will risk damaging the new shoots that are starting to emerge. Cut back cool-season grass to about a third of last year's growth. Be mindful not to cut back too much foliage as it can harm the plant's growth. Warm-season grass can be pruned later in the spring because the new shoots take longer to emerge. Again, be careful not to wait so long that the new foliage is already emerging. Warm-season grasses can be cut 3 to 4 inches from the ground.

Note: If you can already see new green growth as you prepare to prune, just cut above the new growth to allow the grass to continue to grow.

In closing, the spent flowers and seed heads of ornamental grass, along with the dried foliage can add interest to the landscape throughout winter, not to mention a great sanctuary/habitat for birds. Although the dead foliage of the grasses could be cut back in late fall, many gardeners choose to enjoy the beautiful foliage throughout the winter months.

Reference:

<https://www.sedgwick.k-state.edu/gardening-lawn-care/trees-shrubs-flowers/ornamental-grasses.html>