



Gardening with Grasses: What is so great about grasses?

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Benefits of grasses

Native grasses are beautiful and diverse plants. While sedges (see page 22–23) primarily grow in shady and/or wet spots, most grasses prefer full sun and can thrive in difficult spots like dry slopes (Little Bluestem – *Schizachyrium scoparium*), wet spots (Lamp Rush – *Juncus effusus*) or heavy clay soils (Wild Oats – *Chasmanthemum latifolium*). Unlike turf grasses, our beautiful native grasses are resilient and tough, their roots reaching deep to survive harsh conditions. Native grasses need very little maintenance, they are pest- and disease-free, and deer resistant. And native grasses are loved by the birds, feeding seed-eaters in fall and winter, and sheltering ground nesters in summer.

Grasses are also quite beautiful, providing a distinctive airy effect in the garden. Their subtle flowers and seed heads are colored with hints of yellow, purple or pink, and many species also change foliage color with the seasons. They mix well with other plants and their graceful presence contributes sound and movement, enlivening your garden.

Ornamental grasses fill many roles in the garden and landscape:

- Grasses such as Love Grass (*Eragrostis spectabilis*) or Woodrush (*Luzula acuminata*) make a great mixer with colorful native flowers like Purple Coneflower (*Echinacea*) and Rose Tickseed (*Coreopsis rosea*).
- Bold, tall grasses such as Dallas Blues Switchgrass (*Panicum virgatum*) can be used as specimen plants, or plant them in a row to make a beautiful winter hedge.
- Plant colorful Hair-awn Muhly (*Muhlenbergia capillaris*) or Blue Heaven Little Bluestem (*Schizachyrium*) as a border or edging a pathway, driveway or fence. Alternate with clumps of Nodding Onion (*Allium cernuum*) for extra color.
- Create your own small meadow with Broom Sedge (*Andropogon virginicus*) and Yellow Indian Grass (*Sorghastrum nutans*), adding Milkweed (*Asclepias*), Asters (*Symphyotrichum*) and Goldenrod (*Solidago*) for pollinators.
- Feature grasses such as Cape Breeze Switch Grass (*Panicum virgatum*) in pots or containers singly, or with other annuals and perennials.
- Grow moisture-tolerant species such as Switch Grass (*Panicum virgatum*) or Poverty Rush (*Juncus effusus*) in moist soil, bog gardens or beside ponds, mixed with Cardinal Flower (*Lobelia cardinalis*).
- In shady spots try grasses like Wild Oats (*Chasmanthemum latifolium*), or Tufted Hair Grass (*Deschampsia cespitosa*), with Solomon's Seal (*Polygonatum*) or False Solomon's Seal (*Maianthemum*).
- Try salt-tolerant Splitbeard Bluestem (*Andropogon ternarius*) along a sunny roadway or ditch.

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Schizachyrium scoparium (p 7)

Eragrostis spectabilis (p 6)

Chasmanthemum latifolium (p 6)

Panicum v. Dallas Blues (p 7)