



ORNAMENTAL GRASSES



Tips for the Home Gardener

The rich textures and varied colors of ornamental grasses will revitalize the landscape of any home garden. Occurring as both perennials and annuals, they can be used for a variety of purposes, ranging from container gardening and ground covers to fabulous winter interest. The fast-growing habit of ornamental grasses makes it possible to give any garden a delightfully speedy makeover.

Ornamental Grasses Listed by Category of Use

Through careful selection, you can find ornamental grasses suitable for challenging sites and a variety of purposes in the garden and home. The following chart shows just a sampling of ornamental grasses that have special uses, with information recorded from plants grown at Longwood Gardens.

Drought Tolerant	Mature Height	Seed Head Dates
*Big bluestem <i>Andropogon gerardii</i>	6 ft.	Sept. - Dec.
*Broom sedge <i>Andropogon virginicus</i>	5 ft.	Sept. - Nov.
*Sideoats grama <i>Bouteloua curtipendula</i>	4 ft.	July - Nov.
Feather reed grass <i>Calamagrostis</i> × <i>acutiflora</i> 'Karl Foerster'	5 ft.	June - Feb.
*Switch grass <i>Panicum virgatum</i>	6 ft.	July - Mar.
Wet Site Tolerant		
Giant reed <i>Arundo donax</i>	15 ft.	Sept. - Nov.
*Scottish tufted hair grass <i>Deschampsia cespitosa</i> 'Schottland'	4 ft.	July - Aug.
*Ribbon grass <i>Phalaris arundinacea</i> 'Picta'	5 ft.	June - Aug.
*Feeseys ribbon grass <i>Phalaris arundinacea</i> 'Feeseys'	5 ft.	June - Aug.
Cut Flower Use		
*Elliot's broom sedge <i>Andropogon eliottii</i>	5 ft.	Sept. - Nov.
*Big bluestem <i>Andropogon gerardii</i>	6 ft.	Sept. - Dec.
Quaking grass <i>Briza media</i>	2 ft.	May - June
*Silver plume grass <i>Saccharum alopcurioides</i>	8 ft.	Sept. - Mar.

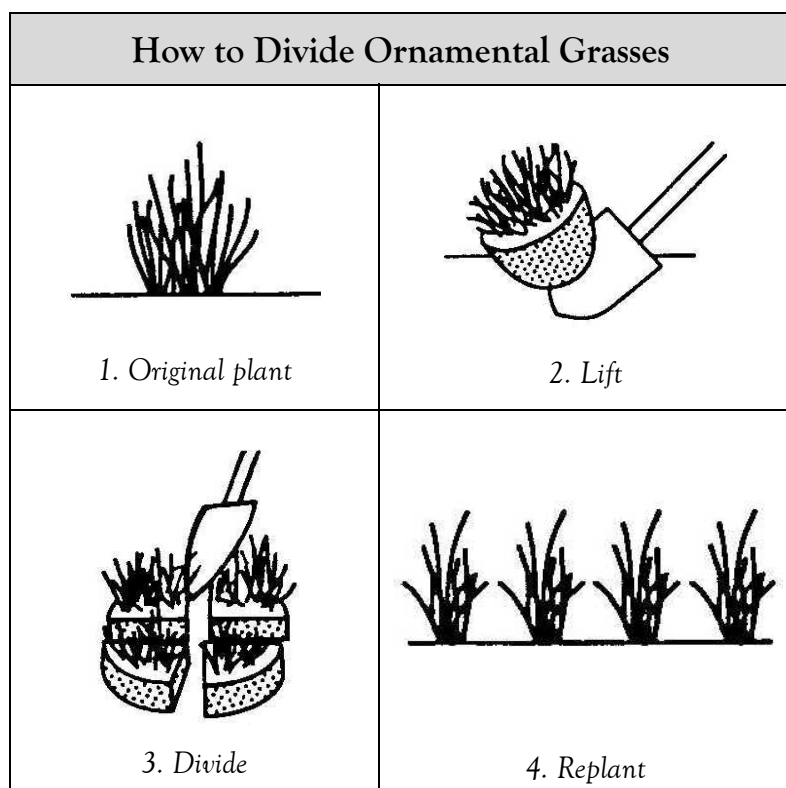
*Denotes grasses that are native to North America

For a more extensive list of ornamental grasses divided by categories of use, consult the following lists on Longwood Garden's web site (www.longwoodgardens.org/EducationalResources.html):

- ☞ [Ornamental Grasses Native to North America](#)
- ☞ [Ornamental Grasses for Colored Foliage](#)
- ☞ [Ornamental Grasses for Various Garden Conditions](#)
- ☞ [Ornamental Grasses for Floral Arrangements](#)

Ornamental Grass Care Tips

- ☞ After planting your ornamental grasses, water them regularly until they are established. Then, water only during dry spells.
- ☞ For a neat appearance, the grasses should be cut back once a year, in early spring before new growth appears. Cutting them to 3" to 6" from the ground is adequate, and also provides space for an interplanting of early spring bulbs.
- ☞ When the center of the plant begins to thin and die out, it is time to divide your grasses. The best time of year to do this is in early spring, when the ground tends to be moist. With a shovel, lift the grass clumps from the ground. Next, divide them into sections with a sharp knife or spade. Finally, replant the divisions or share them with family and friends.



Aggressive Spreaders

All grasses spread to new areas with underground rhizomes. There are two types of growth habits: clump-forming and spreading. Clump-forming grasses increase in width gradually, while spreading types tend to expand quickly and sometimes aggressively.

Many non-native grasses exhibit aggressive spreading characteristics as well as a dangerous lack of pests, diseases, and other environmental constraints that control them in their native areas. Grasses like Asian bamboo have consistently out-competed native plants, invading and colonizing natural areas as well as our backyards.

You can help improve the invasive species problem by using native ornamental grasses in your garden. Doing so will help conserve and preserve local species, and reduce the danger to native plants if the grasses spread beyond your garden.

If you plan on using any spreading-type grasses, consider planting them in a sunken container to prevent them from spreading beyond the garden.

Longwood's Ornamental Grass Display

Visit Longwood's Idea Garden for a living catalog of perennial, reliably hardy members of the grass family which vary in use, size, form, texture, and color. The display focuses on the best grasses currently available for gardeners in southeastern Pennsylvania