

ORNAMENTAL GRASSES FOR HALIBURTON COUNTY

(information sheet prepared by Belinda Gallagher, Master Gardener Emeritus. 2017)

Ornamental grasses and grass-like plants (rushes, cattails, bamboos, papyrus, sweet flag and New Zealand flax) are widely used in landscaping and in annual displays. It is important to know the main traits of these plants, particularly the spreading habits (clumping, running, self-seeding), native range, and growth season when advising the public about their choices.

Grasses are found on all of the continents of the world and in all habitats. Not only are they the principle source of food for man and domestic animals, there are hundreds of other uses - paper, perfume, sugar, timber among them. They are critical in erosion control, both wind and water.

In terms of maintenance, remember these three rules:

1. Never water. Too much water makes stems heavy and they will droop.
2. Never fertilize. Fertilizer stimulates weak growth.
3. Cut back warm season plants to about 6". Small grasses and carex (sedges) can be combed or given a very light clip to re-shape before new growth starts. Cutting back too far can damage the crown.

The grasses listed under the 'Best' categories are Belinda's choices and have proven to be reliably hardy in Haliburton County (Zone 4 a or b).

<i>Cool Season Grasses & Sedges</i>	<i>Warm Season Grasses</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Active growth in early spring and fall when temperature is between 15 and 20 C.• Bloom in early spring• Dormant or slow-growing in heat of summer• Cool season grasses are native to areas with hot dry summers• Sedges tend to be woodland/wetland plants• Generally smaller plants• Evergreen in mild areas• Several species native to Haliburton area	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Active when temperatures are above 25 C.• When spring is long and cold, growth may not start until mid summer. Don't despair!• Flower in late summer or fall• Often used as specimen plants• Foliage usually colours beautifully, particularly after frost• Dormant for winter• Several species are Canadian prairie plants

<p>Examples: Carex - sedge Deschampsia - tufted hair grass Elymus - Lyme grass or wild rye Festuca - fescue Helictotrichon - blue oat grass Koeleria - hair grass Melica - melic grass</p>	<p>Examples: Andropogon - big bluestem Bouteloua - mosquito grass, side-oats gramma Chasmanthium - wood oats Miscanthus - maiden or Eulalie grass (non-native) Panicum - switch grass Pennisetum - fountain grass Schizachrium - little bluestem Sorghastrum - Indian grass Spodiopogon - prairie dropseed</p>
<p>Best Summer inflorescences (flowers)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Calamagrostis ‘Karl Foerster’ • Carex sp. and cultivars - sedges • Deschampsia - tufted hair grass • Koelaria cristata - June grass • Sesleria sp. - moor grass • Sporobolus heterolepsis - prairie dropseed 	<p>Best Fall flowers or seedheads</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Andropogon gerardii - big bluestem • Bouteloua gracilis - mosquito grass • B. curtipendula - side oats gramma • Calamagrostis brachytricha- feather reed grass • Miscanthus cultivars - maiden grass • Panicum cultivars - switch grass • Pennisetum cultivars - fountain grass
<p>Best Fall Colour</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Andropogon gerardii - big blue stem • Miscanthus cultivars - maiden grass • Panicum cultivars - switch grass • Sorghastrum nutans - Indian grass • Spodiopogon sibiricus - frost grass • Sporobolus heterolepsis - Prairie dropseed • Schizachyrium - little blue stem 	<p>Best Woodland</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Carex sp. and cultivars - sedges • Deschampsia - tufted hair grass • Hakenochloa cultivars - hakone grass • Hystrix patula - bottlebrush grass • Luzula nivea - snowy wood rush • Luzula sylvatica - wood rush • Millium effusum aureum - Bowle’s Golden grass

Best Miscanthus cultivars

- M. 'Autumn Light'
- M. 'Bluttenwonder'
- M. 'Gracillimus'
- M. 'Morning Light'
- M. 'Strictus' - porcupine grass
- M. 'Variegatus'
- M. 'Zebrinus' - zebra grass

Belinda's all-time favourites

- Sporobolus heterolepsis - prairie dropseed
- Panicum 'Warrior'
- Miscanthus 'Gracillimus'
- Miscanthus 'Malepartus'
- Andropogon - big blue stem
- Sorghastrum nutans - Indian grass
- Schizachyrium - little bluestem
- Carex petrei - brown sedge
- Festuca 'Festina' - blue fescue
- Koeleria glauca - June grass

Grow as annuals

- Briza media - quaking grass
- Croix lacryma-jobi - Job's tears
- Carex testacea - orange sedge
- Isolepsis - fiber optic grass
- Papyrus
- Pennisetum - fountain grass
- Phormium - New Zealand flax
- Stipa - hair grass
- Zea mays - ornamental corn

INVASIVE - DO NOT GROW!

- Holcus - velvet grass
- Leymus - lyme grass
- Phalaris - ribbon grass
- **Phragmites** - common reed grass
- Spartina - cord grass