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Ornamental Grasses for Indiana Landscapes

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Ornamental grasses offer diverse alternative plant choices for landscape use in Indiana. Unlike shrubbery, which may require skillful pruning to maintain its attractive form and size, perennial ornamental grasses grow only to a predictable size each growing season. The only pruning needed is to cut them back to the ground in fall or spring. Grasses have unique colors, textures, and forms which cannot be found in other plant groups. And many provide increased fall and winter seasonal interest, with a visual quality very different from traditional tree and shrub evergreens.

Most ornamental grasses suitable for landscape use are perennial, clump-forming, or "bunch" grasses. They tend to stay in the location they are planted and do not spread rapidly like the sod-forming or "turf" grasses used for lawns. However, the bunches do increase slowly over time. As they enlarge, they may be lifted and divided to increase the number of plants available for landscape use.

Grasses are easy to grow. You need to make careful species choices for your site conditions and then give the plants ordinary care. Most are tolerant of average soil conditions. A few are well adapted to quite wet or dry soils.

Contrary to popular belief, all grasses do produce flowers. They are not the showy flowers we associate with garden flowers or flowering shrubs. However, they do have fascinating textures and colors, and give a changing quality to landscapes. An extra bonus from the flowers of grasses is that they are beautiful in dried arrangements.

The lists of ornamental grasses included in this publication are intended as a starting point to help you become familiar with this new and interesting plant group. There are literally hundreds of species and cultivars of grasses from which you can choose for landscape planting. These lists can only scratch the surface. However, the

plants listed here have demonstrated their suitability for Indiana growing conditions. Each plant is listed with size and form information and recommendations for the type of site conditions that are required for the grass to thrive.



Grasses Not Native to North America

Giant Reed

Arundo donax

Height: 8 feet +
 Texture: Coarse
 Hardiness: USDA 6, perhaps 5
 Habit: Slowly spreading
 Soil moisture: Moderate to moist
 Light: Full sun
 Flowering time: October
 Native origin: Europe

Plume Grass, Ravenna Grass

Erianthus ravennae

Height: 8 feet +
 Texture: Coarse to medium
 Hardiness: USDA 6, 5
 Habit: Bunch (may self sow)
 Soil moisture: Moderate
 Light: Full sun
 Flowering time: September - October
 Native origin: Europe

Eulalia, Maiden Grass, Zebra Grass, Striped Eulalia, Purple Eulalia

Miscanthus sinensis and cvs.

Height: 5 - 7 feet
 Texture: Medium to fine
 Hardiness: USDA 4
 Habit: Bunch
 Soil moisture: Moderate
 Light: Full sun
 Flowering time: September - October
 Native origin: China, Japan

Purple Moor Grass (Tall Moor Grass)

Molinia caerulea subsp. *arundinacea* (or var. *altissima*)

Height: 4 - 5 feet
 Texture: Moderate to fine
 Hardiness: USDA 5 - 9
 Habit: Bunch
 Soil moisture: Moderate to wet
 Light: Full sun, part shade
 Flowering time: July
 Native origin: Eurasia

Feather Reed Grass

Calamagrostis acutiflora 'Stricta'

Height: 3 - 5 feet
 Texture: Fine
 Hardiness: USDA 4
 Habit: Bunch
 Soil moisture: Tolerant dry to moist
 Light: Full sun, part shade
 Flowering time: June, but effective all summer
 Native origin: Eurasia

Fountain Grass and Dwarf Fountain Grass

Pennisetum alopecuroides & *P.a.* 'Hameln' (dwarf)

Height: 3 - 4 feet (2 - 3 feet dwarf)
 Texture: Fine
 Hardiness: USDA 5
 Habit: Bunch
 Soil moisture: Moderate
 Light: Full sun, part shade
 Flowering time: August, shattering before winter
 Native origin: Eastern Asia, Australia

Blue Oatgrass

Helictotrichon sempervirens

Height: 2 - 3 feet
 Texture: Fine
 Hardiness: USDA 5
 Habit: Tight bunch, stiff
 Soil moisture: Moderate
 Light: Full sun, part shade
 Flowering time: Spring, but seldom in Indiana
 Native origin: Eurasia

Blue Lyme Grass

Elymus arenarius 'Glaucus'

Height: 2 - 3 feet
 Texture: Medium
 Hardiness: USDA 4 - 10
 Habit: Spreading, barrier needed to contain spread
 Soil moisture: Dry
 Light: Full sun, part shade
 Flowering time: June to August
 Native origin: Eurasia

Quaking Grass

Briza media

Height: 1 - 3 feet
 Texture: Moderate
 Hardiness: USDA 4 - 5
 Habit: Bunch
 Soil moisture: Moderate, widely tolerant
 Light: Full sun
 Flowering time: June, shatter by August
 Native origin: Mediterranean region

Bronzeschleier Tufted Hair Grass

Deschampaia caespitosa 'Bronzeschleier'

Height: 1 - 3 feet
 Texture: Fine
 Hardiness: USDA 4 - 9
 Habit: Bunch
 Soil moisture: Moderate to wet
 Light: Full sun, part shade
 Flowering time: June
 Native origin: European selection

Autumn Moor Grass*Sesleria autumnalis*

Height: 1/2 - 3 feet
 Texture: Moderate
 Hardiness: USDA 5 - 9
 Habit: Bunch
 Soil moisture: Moderate, widely tolerant
 Light: Full sun, part shade
 Flowering time: August
 Native origin: Italy to Albania

Japanese Blood Grass*Imperata cylindrica*

Height: 1 - 2 feet
 Texture: Moderate
 Hardiness: USDA 4 - 5
 Habit: Slowly spreading
 Soil moisture: Moderate to wet
 Light: Full sun best, part shade
 Flowering time: Seldom seen
 Native origin: Japan

Blue Hair Grass*Koeleria glauca*

Height: 1/2 - 1 foot
 Texture: Fine
 Hardiness: USDA 6
 Habit: Bunch
 Soil moisture: Dry to moderate
 Light: Full sun
 Flowering time: June
 Native origin: Europe to Siberia

Variegated Bulbous Oat Grass*Arrhenatherum elatius bulbosum* 'Variegatum'

Height: 1 foot +
 Texture: Fine to moderate
 Hardiness: USDA 4
 Habit: Bunch, slowly expanding
 Soil moisture: Moderate, survives dry
 Light: Full sun, part shade
 Flowering time: Seldom, few, August
 Native origin: Europe

Blue Fescue Grass*Festuca ovina* 'Glaucua' (or *F. cinerea*)

Height: 1/2 - 1 foot
 Texture: Fine
 Hardiness: USDA 4
 Habit: Bunch
 Soil moisture: Moderate to dry
 Light: Full sun, part shade
 Flowering time: July
 Native origin: Europe

Native North American Grasses**Big Bluestem***Andropogon gerardii*

Height: 4 - 6 feet (8+ in wet)
 Texture: Moderate
 Hardiness: USDA 2
 Habit: Bunch
 Soil moisture: Moderate, widely tolerant
 Light: Sun
 Flowering time: August - September

Prairie Cordgrass & Variegated Cordgrass*Spartina pectinata* (& *S.p.* 'Aureomarginata')

Height: 4- 8 feet
 Texture: Moderate to coarse
 Hardiness: USDA 3
 Habit: Vigorously spreading
 Soil moisture: Moderate to wet tolerant
 Light: Full sun
 Flowering time: August - September

Indiangrass*Sorghastrum nutans*

Height: 3 - 6 feet
 Texture: Moderate
 Hardiness: USDA 2
 Habit: Bunch
 Soil moisture: Moderate to dry tolerant
 Light: Full sun
 Flowering time: August - September

Switchgrass (& Red Switchgrass)*Panicum virgatum* (& *P.v.* 'Rostrahlbusch')

Height: 3 - 5 feet
 Texture: Moderate
 Hardiness: USDA 2
 Habit: Bunch, but slowly spreading
 Soil moisture: Moderate to dry tolerant
 Light: Full sun, part shade
 Flowering time: August - September

Sand Love Grass*Eragrostis trichodes*

Height: 4 - 5 feet
 Texture: Moderate to fine
 Hardiness: USDA 5
 Habit: Bunch
 Soil moisture: Moderate to dry
 Light: Full sun
 Flowering time: September - October

Side-oats Grama

Bouteloua curtipendula

Height: 1 - 3 feet
Texture: Fine
Hardiness: USDA 3
Habit: Bunch
Soil moisture: Moderate to dry
Light: Full sun
Flowering time: June - July

Little Bluestem

Schizachyrium scoparium

Height: 1 - 3 feet
Texture: Moderate to fine
Hardiness: USDA 4
Habit: Bunch
Soil moisture: Moderate to dry
Light: Full sun
Flowering time: August

Prairie Dropseed

Sporobolus heterolepis

Height: 1 - 3 feet
Texture: Fine
Hardiness: USDA 2
Habit: Tight bunch
Soil moisture: Moderate to dry
Light: Full sun
Flowering time: August

For Further Reading on Ornamental Grasses

The Encyclopedia of Ornamental Grasses. 1992. John Greenlee. Rodale Press, Emmaus, PA.

Ornamental Grasses, The Amber Wave. 1988. Carole Ottesen. McGraw-Hill, NY.

The National Arboretum Book of Outstanding Garden Plants. 1990. Jacqueline Heriteau. Simon and Schuster, NY.

Taylor's Guide to Groundcovers, Vines & Grasses. 1987. Houghton Mifflin Co., NY.

For more information on the subject discussed in this publication, consult your local office of the Purdue University Cooperative Extension Service.
