Whether you are looking for a modest filler or a dynamic specimen plant, ornamental grasses are wonderful additions to the garden.

**Beautiful …**

Whether you are looking for a modest filler or a dynamic specimen plant, ornamental grasses are wonderful additions to the garden. Ornamental grasses are valuable for their distinctive leaf structure, delicate blossoms, decorative seed heads and their ease of maintenance. Grass foliage moves in a breeze and catches light like few other plants. Not only do grasses come in many shades of green, but there are also grasses in a variety of blues, reds, russets, golds and yellows, and in the fall, endless shades of tan and brown. Grasses also offer patterned foliage with variegations of white, ivory, cream or yellow. With so much decorative potential, there is a grass for every garden.

**Care free …**

Beauty is not the only reason to include ornamental grasses in your landscape. They also require very little care. Ornamental grasses are virtually pest free, not troubled by disease, have the ability to withstand a variety of environmental conditions and are almost foolproof. Unlike many garden plants, grasses grow quickly to their mature size — their effect in the garden is immediate. Once established, they do not require fertilizer, supplemental water or other help to grow. Actually, ornamental grasses are at their best when we leave them alone. After planting, you should allow them to grow without mowing, clipping, staking, deadheading or cutting them back — except once each year in the early spring.

**Practical …**

There are also some practical reasons to include ornamental grasses in your garden. Warm season grasses are ideal for filling spaces left by spring bulbs or early flowering perennials because they put on most of their growth when the weather heats up. Sturdy ornamental grasses mingle and support weaker-stemmed plants. They help minimize the need for staking. Short or medium height grasses are perfect companions for covering the bare stems of taller growing perennials.

**Versatile …**

*And the very best reason for including grasses in your garden …* ornamental grasses are truly versatile garden partners. They work well in just about any garden situation, as they are natural companions to many bulbs, perennials, shrubs and evergreens. The following combinations are ones that will allow you to create stunning gardens with little design know-how.

- Panicum virgatum ‘Heavy Metal’
- Aster Novae-angliae ‘Hella Lacy’
- Calamagrostis arundinacea ‘Overdam’
- Peonies
- Eupatorium ‘Gateway’
- Miscanthus sinensis ‘Cosmopolitan’
- ‘Knock Out’ Rose
- Miscanthus sinensis ‘Morning Light’
- Russian Sage (Perovskia atriplicifolia)
- Achillea ‘Coronation Gold’
### Grasses

- **Hakonechloa macra ‘Aureola’**
- **Lysimachia nummularia ‘Aurea’**
- **Hosta ‘Frances Williams’**

- **Calamagrostis x acutiflora ‘Karl Foerster’**
- **Eupatorium ‘Gateway’**
- **Russian Sage (Perovskia atriplicifolia)**
- **Echinacea purpurea ‘Magnus’**

- **Miscanthus sinensis ‘Strictus’ (Porcupine Grass)**
- **Mugho Pine**
- **Coreopsis verticillata ‘Zagreb’**

- **Compact Butning Bush (Euonymus alatus ‘Compactus’)**
- **Pennisetum alopecuroides ‘Hameln’ + Sedum ‘Autumn Joy’**

- **Miscanthus sinensis ‘Graziella’**
- **Gaura lindheimeri ‘Siskiyou Pink’**
- **Echinacea purpurea ‘Bright Star’**
- **Pennisetum alopecuroides ‘Little Bunny’**

- **Prairie Dropseed (Sporobolus heterolepis)**
- **Solidago canadensis ‘Baby Gold’**
- **Sedum ‘Autumn Joy’**
- **Chrysanthemum ‘Clara Curtis’**

- **Calamagrostis arundinacea ‘Overdam’**
- **Iris sibirica ‘Butter and Sugar’**
- **Lady’s Mantle (Alchemilla mollis)**

- **Cotinus coggygria ‘Royal Purple’ or ‘Young Lady’**
- **Miscanthus sinensis ‘Gracillimus’**
- **Russian Sage (Perovskia atriplicifolia)**

- **Panicum virgatum ‘Prairie Sky’**
- **Solidago rugosa ‘Fireworks’**
- **Aster novi-angliae ‘Alma Potscke’**
- **Sedum ‘Autumn Joy’**
- **Prairie Dropseed (sporobolus heterolepis)**

- **Panicum virgatum ‘Shenandoah’**
- **Heliopsis ‘Summer Sun’**
- **Echinacea purpurea ‘White Swan’**
- **Russian Sage (Perovskia atriplicifolia)**

- **Panicum virgatum ‘Prairie Sky’**
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- **Panicum virgatum ‘Shenandoah’**
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- **Echinacea purpurea ‘White Swan’**
- **Russian Sage (Perovskia atriplicifolia)**

- **Picea pungens ‘Blue Globe’**
- **Calamagrostis arundinacea ‘Karl Foerster’**
- **Miscanthus sinensis ‘Yaku Jima’**
- **Pennisetum alopecuroides ‘Hameln’**

- **Panicum virgatum ‘Heavy Metal’**
- **Baptisia australis**
- **Coreopsis grandiflora ‘Early Sunrise’**
- **Echinacea Purpurea ‘Crimson Star’**

- **Calamagrostis x acutiflora ‘Karl Foerster’**
- **Viburnum plicatum var. tomentosum ‘Shasta’**
Following is a list of ornamental grasses that are considered worthy of a place in your garden. This list is not a comprehensive list — you will find many plants for sale at nurseries that are not included.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Height</th>
<th>Description</th>
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</table>
| Giant Reed Grass *Arundo donax*                | 10-14 ft | • A bold, giant grass with bamboo-like canes and long, drooping, gray-green-blue leaves.  
• Foot-long flowers in late season.  
• Excellent as a specimen or screen. |
| Pampas Grass *Saccharum ravennae*              | 10-14 ft | • Large, creamy-white plumes form in late summer above a beautiful mound of arching gray-green leaves.  
• Serves as a dramatic specimen or a spot screen. |
| Cabaret Silvergrass *Miscanthus sinensis*      | 5-6 ft  | • Copper colored plumes appear in late summer.  
• Wide ribbon-like leaves have a creamy white center. |
| Cosmopolitan Silver Grass *Miscanthus sinensis*| 5-6 ft  | • A wide-leaved, brightly variegated form.  
• Leaves are just the reverse variegation of ‘Cabaret’, green with white margins. |
| Graziella Silver Grass *Miscanthus sinensis*   | 5-7 ft  | • Silvery plumes late in the season are held well above the foliage making a dramatic display.  
• Fall color is a wonderful burgundy-bronze. |
| *Panicum virgatum* ‘Dallas Blues’              | 6-8 ft  | • Steel blue foliage topped with pastel-mauve flower heads in the fall. One of the best for blue color.  
• Extremely hardy selection. |
| Maiden Grass *Miscanthus sinensis*             | 5-6 ft  | • Very narrow leaves form a graceful, upright, dense clump.  
• Plumes form late in the season. Winter color is that of dried corn husks. |
| Porcupine Grass *Miscanthus sinensis*          | 6-8 ft  | • Striking horizontal yellow bands. Good for poolside planting. |
| Variegated Silver Grass *Miscanthus sinensis*  | 5-6 ft  | • Beautiful green and white variegated foliage.  
• Clump forming, vase-shaped habit. Stunning plant. May need staking. |
| *Panicum virgatum* ‘Dallas Blues’              | 6-8 ft  | • Steel blue foliage topped with pastel-mauve flower heads in the fall. One of the best for blue color.  
• Extremely hardy selection. |
| *Panicum virgatum* ‘Northwind’                 | 6-8 ft  | • Sturdy, upright growth habit.  
• Steel blue stems and olive green blades.  
• Best as a screen or mass planting. |

**Grasses for the middle of the border**

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</table>
| Feather Reed Grass *Calamagrostis arundinacea* ‘Karl Foerster’ | 4-5 ft  | • Upright, narrow habit.  
• Best grass for long period of show.  
• First to leaf out in spring.  
• Pink, showy, narrow, spikey blooms appear in June followed by bright gold seed heads in late summer. |
| Feather Reed Grass *Calamagrostis arundinacea* ‘Overdam’ | 3-4 ft  | • Foot high variegated foliage is edged in white.  
• Three foot tall gold plumes grow above the foliage in early summer. |
| Feather Reed Grass *Calamagrostis* x acutiflora ‘Eldorado* | 4-5 ft  | • Variegated selection of ‘Karl Foerster’, dark green foliage, yellow stripe.  
• Vertical habit and valuable accent in the landscape. |
### Grasses

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| Feather Reed Grass  
*Calamagrostis acutiflora ‘Avalanche’* | 4-5 ft | - Variegated selection of ‘Karl Foerster’, green blades with white stripe in center.  
- Seedheads last through summer. |
| *Miscanthus sinensis*  
‘Morning Light’ | 4-5 ft | - Graceful, fine-textured, clumping grass with pastel green and white variegated foliage.  
- Feathery plumes in fall. |
| *Miscanthus sinensis*  
‘Adagio’ | 3-4 ft | - Slender, silvery foliage forms a compact, graceful clump.  
- Silvery-white blooms are held well above the foliage in the fall. |
| *Autumn Flame Grass*  
*Miscanthus sinensis ‘Purpurascens’* | 3-4 ft | - Very upright, almost vertical habit.  
- Green leaves take on a bright orange-red color in fall.  
- Magenta-colored fans appear early, mature to white. |
| Dwarf Maiden Grass  
*Miscanthus sinensis ‘Yaku Jima’* | 3-4 ft | - A compact version of Maiden Grass.  
- Dark green, delicate blades form a graceful, vase-shaped clump.  
- Early bloomer. |
| Little Zebra Grass  
*Miscanthus sinensis ‘Little Zebra’* | 3-4 ft | - Smaller growth habit than Porcupine grass.  
- Green grass blades are banded with bright golden-yellow.  
- Attractive pinkish-copper flower plumes late in the summer. |
| *Miscanthus sinensis ‘Gold Bar’* | 4-5 ft | - Dense growth with horizontal stripes.  
- Compact, erect habit, 4-5 ft by October.  
- Border or container.  
- Blooms in late October. |
| Switch Grass  
*Panicum virgatum ‘Heavy Metal’* | 4-5 ft | - Clumping, steel blue foliage on very stiffly upright plants.  
- One of the best grasses for winter show.  
- Frost turns switch grass a wheat color and stiffens its blades.  
- Adds a wonderful contrast to the landscape. |
| Switch Grass  
*Panicum virgatum ‘Shenandoah’* | 3-5 ft | - A tough selection of one of our native prairie grasses.  
- One of the few red-foliaged grasses available that will survive our winters.  
- Foliage is tipped with deep, blood-red highlights and seedheads share the same color late in the season.  
- Wonderful reddish-purple fall color. |
| Blue Stem  
*Schizachyrium scoparius ‘Blue Heaven’* | 3-4 ft | - Nice dark blue to burgundy summer color.  
- Red to purple or violet fall color.  
- Upright growth habit makes it a nice selection. |

### Grasses for the front of the border

<table>
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</table>
| Prairie Dropseed  
*Sporobolus heterolepis* | 2-3 ft | - A very tough native prairie grass.  
- This is a slow-growing, small species with rich emerald-green foliage throughout the summer. Changing to golden-yellow to orange in the fall.  
- Fragrant flowers rise above the foliage late in the summer. |
| Japanese Forest Grass  
*Hakonechloa macro ‘Aureola’* | 12-18 in | - Beautiful arching form  
- Wonderful yellow to golden foliage often variegates.  
- Does best in light shade.  
- Prefers even moisture for best growth. |
| Dwarf Fountain Grass  
*Pennisetum alopecuroides ‘Hamlin’* | 2-3 ft | - Graceful, narrow leaves and copper-tan bottle brush blooms in fall.  
- Compact and neat. |
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Pennisetum orientale</em> ‘Karley Rose’</td>
<td>2-3 ft</td>
<td>An elegant selection with beautiful rose-purple flowers rising above rich green foliage.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Pennisetum alopecuroides</em> ‘Little Bunny’</td>
<td>10-12 in</td>
<td>Smallest of the fountain grasses. Makes a small mound of soft green.</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Miscanthus sinensis</em> ‘Little Kitten’</td>
<td>2-3 ft</td>
<td>Small, compact form with narrow leaf blades. Does not flower as heavy as other types.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dwarf Fescue <em>Fescue ovina var. glauca</em> ‘Elijah Blue’ or ‘Boulder Blue’</td>
<td>8-12 in</td>
<td>Nice silver-blue foliage, low growing clump. Tends to be short-lived in landscape Needs well-drained soils.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

References
- “Ornamental Grasses for the Midwest.” North Central Regional Extension Publications.