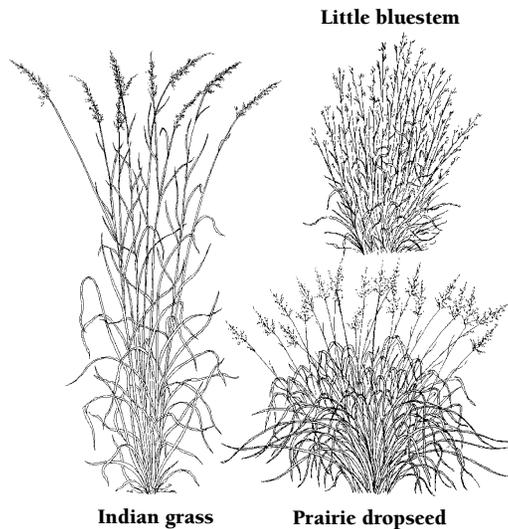


**Little bluestem** (*Schizachyrium scoparium*) is another native prairiegrass. Plants typically grow 2 to 3 feet tall and are topped with silvery white flower heads. The blue-green foliage of little bluestem turns brownish-orange in the fall. The warm glow of a setting sun on little bluestem in the fall is a truly spectacular site. The seeds of little bluestem are food for songbirds.

**Indian grass** (*Sorghastrum nutans*) is an upright, clump-forming grass which grows 4 to 6 feet tall and produces yellow-brown flowers in late summer. The fall color is deep orange to purple eventually fading to tan.

**Prairie dropseed** (*Sporobolus heterolepis*) is commonly found in dry prairie sites, such as the Loess Hills in southwestern Iowa. Plants grow about 3 feet tall and form graceful, fountain-like clumps. In the fall, the foliage turns yellow-orange.



---

## General Growing Conditions

Ornamental grasses are adaptable, easy to grow, and provide year-round interest. Most perform best in full sun and a well-drained, moist soil. However, many ornamental grasses will tolerate dry sites, infertile soils, and partial shade. Once established in the landscape, ornamental grasses require little care. They have few insect and disease pests. Watering and fertilization are usually not necessary. One chore that will need to be done each year is to cut back the dead foliage in early spring.

---

## For More Information

Information on selection, planting, cultural practices, and environmental quality is available from your local Iowa State University Extension office and from these Web sites:

ISU Extension Distribution Center—  
[www.extension.iastate.edu/store](http://www.extension.iastate.edu/store)

ISU Horticulture—  
[www.yardandgarden.extension.iastate.edu](http://www.yardandgarden.extension.iastate.edu)

Reiman Gardens—  
[www.reimangardens.iastate.edu](http://www.reimangardens.iastate.edu)

Prepared by Richard Jauron, extension horticulturist; and Diane Nelson, extension communication specialist. Illustrated by Mark Müller.

File: Hort and LA 2-5

### ... and justice for all

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) prohibits discrimination in all its programs and activities on the basis of race, color, national origin, gender, religion, age, disability, political beliefs, sexual orientation, and marital or family status. (Not all prohibited bases apply to all programs.) Many materials can be made available in alternative formats for ADA clients. To file a complaint of discrimination, write USDA, Office of Civil Rights, Room 326-W, Whitten Building, 14th and Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, DC 20250-9410 or call 202-720-5964. Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension work, Acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Jack M. Payne, director, Cooperative Extension Service, Iowa State University of Science and Technology, Ames, Iowa. 1/08

# Ornamental Grasses with Winter Interest

A detailed black and white line drawing of several ornamental grasses. The grasses have long, slender blades and several upright flower stalks with small, clustered seed heads. The drawing is positioned to the right of the main title.

An excellent way to brighten the winter landscape is to plant trees and shrubs that possess ornamental characteristics, such as colorful fruit or exfoliating bark. Though often overlooked, many ornamental grasses also possess winter interest and can provide color, texture, motion, and sound to an otherwise dreary winter landscape. Here are several ornamental grasses that possess winter interest:

**Karl Foerster's feather reed grass**

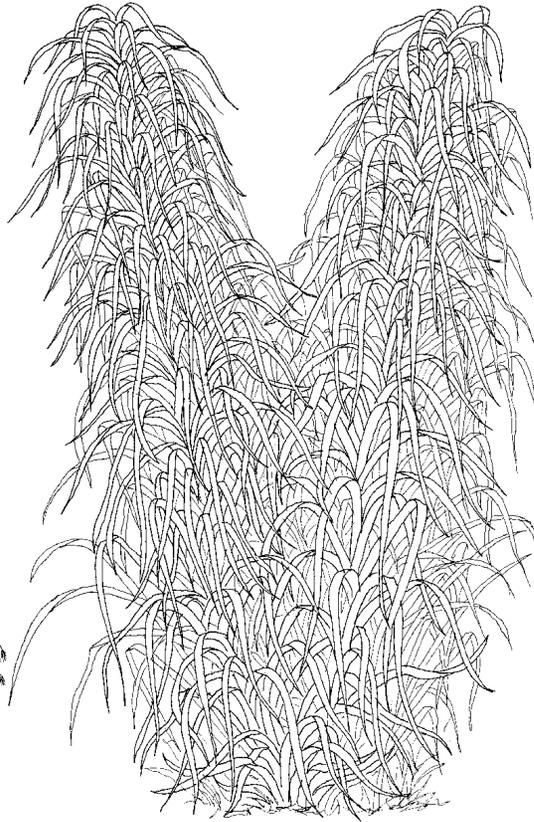
(*Calamagrostis* × *acutiflora* 'Karl Foerster') is a stiff, upright grass. Plants grow 4 to 5 feet tall. Feather reed grass flowers in June. The inflorescence is initially pink to brownish purple, but matures to a beige or golden tan. The fall foliage color is tan. The stiff, upright growth habit and tan fall color give feather reed grass a wheat-like appearance.



**Karl Foerster's feather reed grass**



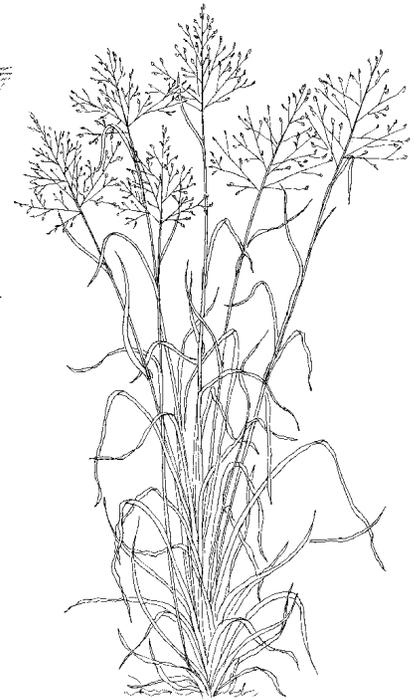
**Northern sea oats**



**Giant miscanthus**



**Silver feather miscanthus**



**Switchgrass**

**Northern sea oats** (*Chasmanthium latifolium*) is an upright-narrow to upright-arching grass. Northern sea oats grow about 3 feet tall. Flowering occurs in summer. The flat, green seedheads, along with the foliage, turn brown to bronze in the fall. The seedheads persist through the winter, dangling in the wind. The brown seedheads also are suitable for dried flower arrangements.

**Giant miscanthus** (*Miscanthus floridulus*) is one of the tallest ornamental grasses. Plants may grow 10 to 12 feet tall. The long, bamboo-like leaves turn tan in the fall. The large leaves rustling in the wind provide sound and movement in the garden through the fall and winter months.

The genus *Miscanthus* contains several species and numerous cultivars of ornamental grasses. **Silver feather miscanthus** (*Miscanthus sinensis* 'Silberfeder') is an upright, clump-forming grass that grows to a height of 6 to 8 feet. Large, silvery white flowers are produced in late summer and are borne high above the foliage. In the fall, 'Silberfeder' has tan foliage and beige plumes.

**Switchgrass** (*Panicum virgatum*) is one of the major grasses in the tallgrass prairie and also is an excellent ornamental. It is an upright grass that varies from 3 to 8 feet in height. The fine-textured inflorescence is reddish-purple fading to beige in the fall. In winter, the foliage is tan or beige in color. The foliage of the cultivars 'Haense Herms', 'Rehbraun', and 'Rotstrahlbusch' turns reddish-brown to red in the fall. Switchgrass also provides food and winter cover for birds and other wildlife.