

Native Grasses for Use in the Landscape

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Most grasses are tolerant of a wide variety of conditions. Divisions are often an easy way to increase your plants. Do not be afraid to try some species in different conditions. Several non-native species are also listed. Some grasses are not native.

Carex plantaginea (*plantain leaved sedge*) A highly ornamental woodland sedge. The leaves are about 1" across and puckered and lime green. Great as an accent, but best in masses. Flowers in early spring. *C. platyphylla* is another broad leaf sedge that can be used as well.

Carex pensylvanica (*Pennsylvania sedge*) – The lawn of the forest. Small black spike flowers in the early spring, it grows to about 6" and has a beautiful wavy appearance on the landscape. Specimen at the edge of a garden, but best in mass under trees because it prefers shade.

Carex eburnea (*Bristle leaf sedge*) – Another low growing *Carex* that blooms in spring. This one tolerates dry soils and shade to part shade. A great "ground cover" in the dry meadow below taller forbs.

Festuca glauca (*dwarf blue grass*) Europe Clump forming, low growing, nice blue color makes a great ground cover.

Carex grayii (*Gray's sedge*) – Light green sedge with interesting "mace like" flowers. It blooms in spring but looks good all season. Good in shade, good in sun. Average soil.

Eragrostis purpurea (*purple love grass*) – This is often most notable along the sides of the highway by the purple hue that is seen in the median or grassy edges. Don't pass on this lovely addition to the garden – it is just as pretty in a garden setting as on the roadside.

Boutelous curtipendula (*side oats grama*) – A moderate size grass with lovely fine texture. This was described to me as "floating mustaches" when it is in flower. Nice texture among *Aquilegia*, *Lupinus*, *Prunella*, *Silene*. Blooms in mid-summer.

Sporobolis heterolepis (*prairie dropseed*) - The cousin "It" of grasses, prairie dropseed forms a lovely mound with airy flowers arising in late summer. This plant also has interesting fall color and can look good into the early winter.

Deschampsia caespitosa (*tufted hairgrass*) – A fine textured grass that produces light green, airy flowers that rise above the neatly rounded tufts of dark green grass. The plant looks good into the early winter.

Schizachyrium scoparium (*little bluestem*) – Beautiful warm season grass. Greens up late in spring and matures in late July, August. Great choice for no-mow or low mow conditions, spectacular fall color.

Elymus hystrix (*bottle brush grass*) – A tall unruly grass that forms a nice arching clump and puts out tall, wavy, bottlebrush flowers in mid-summer. Nice as a specimen or a theme throughout the garden. Seeds in, but is clump forming.

Andropogon glomeratus (*broom sedge*) - A personal favorite. Slow growing in spring forming clumps. Flower stalks begin to arise in late August, later than big bluestem or little bluestem. Beautiful flowers and great winter interest. Tolerates dry soils as well.

Chasmanthium latifolium (*wild oat grass*) – Spectacular flowers and nice fall color. The flowers appear in August and look good until the end of the year. Spreads and seeds in freely, if left un-checked it can be a bit of a thug. Will grow and bloom in part shade.

Ammophila breviligulata (*beach grass*) Commonly found at the shore, in dunes. This grass is great for stabilizing sandy, dry areas. It does not bloom in the Norcross gardens but the wider blade and bluish color makes it attractive in the meadow. Best where the soils are very sandy.

Panicum virgatum (*switch grass*) – Clump forming grass, tall and fountain-like with very small flowers. Great accent plant. Good for naturalizing, background species, or plant to divide spaces.

Andropogon gerardii (*big bluestem*) – The grass you can hug. This species is a prairie remnant. It grows to 10' and needs some room. It is a great accent plant, background species or plant to divide spaces.

Sorghastrum nutans (*Indian grass*) - Lovely rusty-brown flowers with bright yellow stamens. This grass is beautiful as summer turns to fall. Flowering in September it is best planted in masses for a nice effect in the garden.

Elymus canadensis (*Canada bluejoint*) – It looks like blue wheat. Beautiful color, beautiful flowers. It can tolerate drier soils but does best where it gets even moisture throughout the season

Calamagrostis 'Karl Foerster' Easy to grow in average to moist soil and part shade to full sun. Tall, columnar – nice form and provides winter interest.

Moist to Wet soils

Agrostis capillaris - (*colonial bentgrass*) - a European species found throughout our area. It's light, airy flowers make it a nice addition in some locations. Commonly found in fields and meadows.

Carex lupulina (*hop sedge*) - Interesting flowers on this 1 ½ to 3' plant. The flowers are slightly reminiscent of hops. This plants prefers moist to wet locations for best growth.

Carex muskingumensis (*palm sedge*) – One of the most interesting growth forms. This also prefers a moist location but will tolerate a drier soil. Forms large clumps but the individual character of each stem is gorgeous. Tolerates very shady locations.

Carex crinita (*fringed sedge*) I typically find this plant in moist to wet soils – adjacent to wetlands or ponds. Grows well in full sun to part shade, attractive drooping flowers. Clump forming.

Scirpus cyperinus (*wool grass*) – This interesting plant is meant for pond edges. It will grow in evenly moist to wet soils but it really looks great in the edges of the pond. Mix with cardinal flower and cat tails.

Carex stricta (*tussock sedge*) – a moderate, clump forming plant – these are the tussocks you jump on as you cross a wet area. Grows in standing water but will also thrive in moist to wet soils. The area should be at least seasonally wet.

Resources

a) **Hoffman Nursery website at hoffmannursery.com**

b) Mt. Cuba Center trial gardens - mtcubacenter.org/research/trial-garden/

c) References and planting design books that include lots of grasses and sedges

i) *The Encyclopedia of Grasses for Livable Landscapes*, Rick Darke, 2007, Timber Press

ii) *Nature's Best Hope* Doug Tallamy, 2020, Timber Press

iii) *Bringing Nature Home*, Doug Tallamy, 2014, Timber Press

iv) *The Living Landscape*, Rick Darke & Doug Tallamy, 2014, Timber Press

vi) *Garden Revolution*, Larry Weaner and Thomas Christopher, 2016, Timber Press