

The Grasses and Plants of Monocot Meadow

South Bay Botanic Garden @ Southwestern College

Arrhenatherum bulbosum 'Variegatum' - Bulbous Oat Grass: Perennial grass that performs best with moist conditions and in cooler seasons of the year. Clear blue-green blades have white striping forming attractive small clumps good for massing, rock gardens. Deer resistant, slow grower to 12" tall and 18" wide. Needs regular watering – weekly, or more often in hot weather. Slow growth rate with no flowers.

Buchloe dactyloides - Buffalo Grass: Buffalo grass is a warm-season, native, perennial short grass. It grows between 2 and 5 inches (5-13 cm) tall and spreads out between six feet and 12 feet (3-4 m). It has a round hollow stem with gray, green curly leaves. The leaves are 1/10 " wide and 2" long. Buffalo grass is a very hardy grass and grows mostly in the North American prairies. In winter it turns tan and in the autumn it turns lavender. It is very drought resistant. In dry seasons it gets brown, and stops growing, and goes dormant. It is also heat and cold resistant. A good water-saving lawn alternative.

Calamagrostis x acutiflora 'Karl Foerster' – Feather Reed Grass: Create stunning vertical effects with feathery stalks that emerge reddish-brown in spring and turn golden in fall. Blooms 2 to 3 weeks earlier than common feather reed grass. Seeds are sterile. Use stalks as cut flowers. 2001 Perennial Plant of the Year. Full sun, grows to 24" tall and wide, fast growth rate. Needs regular watering and more in hot climates.

Carex testacea – Orange New Zealand Sedge: Bright green at the base, the foliage displays a nice orange-brown color in spring and summer, becoming noticeably orange in winter. Great filler for perennial borders or as a groundcover. Will self-sow but not aggressively. Evergreen. Full to partial sun. Prefers wet to consistently moist soils. Mounding form to 15" tall and wide. Insignificant blooms.

Carex tumulicola (*Carex divulsa*) – Berkeley Sedge: This sedge is an evergreen grass-like plant that forms arching clumps, 12-18 inches tall by 2 feet wide. It is a very versatile plant for use in coastal full sun to fairly deep shade. It tolerates boggy wet soils but is also fairly drought tolerant once established. The plant seems happiest when planted in light shade with regular to occasional irrigation but we have areas in our garden that rarely get irrigated with this plant growing happily, though somewhat smaller. Greenish flowers age to brownish flowers winter and spring and can be sheared off to neaten the plant and prevent reseeding - otherwise expect this plant to seed out into the irrigated areas of the garden. A great clumping plant for use in solid stands or combined with other sedges, grasses and herbaceous plants for a natural meadow look.

Chondropetalum tectorum – Small Cape Rush: This South African plant forms dense tufted clumps from which arise 2-3 feet tall dark green unbranched stems. The dark brown sheaths at the joints drop off in summer leaving a dark band. Late in the season the stems arch gracefully from the weight of clusters of small brown flowers at the tips. Plant in full to part sun. It is drought tolerant, and appreciates supplemental water in spring. It is hardy to about 20-25 degrees F. It can be successfully planted in seaside gardens, used in relatively dry landscapes or as a plant in the shallows of a water garden.

Dasyliirion wheeleri – Desert Spoon: Evergreen succulent with long, gray strap-shaped serrated leaves. The common name, Spoon Yucca, refers to the basal ends of the leaf blades, which form a spoon shape when torn off the trunk. The leaves are a blue-gray and 3 feet long. The shrub holds on to its old leaves making a shaggy skirt. Plant in full sun. It is drought tolerant and can grow to about 4 to 6 feet tall by about 4 feet wide. It is hardy to <15 degrees F.

Deschampsia cespitosa 'Tufted Hair' – Tufted Hair Grass: Graceful mounds of dark green blades topped by wiry stalks of pendulous or nodding dense tufts of unique silvery flowers. Best used in planters to enjoy the view of the flowers. Deer resistant. Full sun, needs regular watering and more in hot weather. Grows to 3' tall and a bit wider.

Eragrostis curvula – Weeping Love Grass: Weeping Lovegrass is a warm season, perennial bunchgrass. It grows to a height of 2-4 feet and has 1/4" leaves of 10 to 20 inches in length. The long folding leaves suggest its name "weeping". Seed heads are erect or drooping and produce small very numerous seeds (1.5 million per lb.). Weeping Lovegrass is established easily by seeds and spreads by tillering. Over a years time a single plant can grow to a diameter of 12-15 inches. Lovegrass was imported from South African in the late 1920's.

Festuca amethystine 'Superba' – Tufted Fescue: Very slender long, sea-green blades form graceful clumps. Narrow, buff-colored plumes appear late summer. Excellent as a specimen or in a rock garden. Gets 1' tall and wide and blooms summer and fall.

Festuca mairei – Atlas Fescue: A long lived evergreen clumping grass that forms fountain like mounds to 18 to 24 inches tall and wide with yellowish gray-green foliage. Plant in full sun or part shade in a well-drained soil with occasional to regular irrigation - this plant is fairly drought tolerant when established but looks better (with less brown tips with occasional water). It is quite cold hardy as dormant grass (USDA Zone 4) and stays evergreen in warmer climates. It is tolerant of diverse soil types and does not need to be cut back, but benefits from a spring raking to remove older foliage. It is a great looking and dependable grass for slopes or for the natural meadow look

Festuca ovina 'Glaucua' – Blue Fescue: The foliage of this species is a light blue-silver early in the season, turning to more blue-green in the summer. In fall it turns a darker mottled green. In mild climates it will remain evergreen through the winter, but may turn brown in harsher winters. The linear leaves, up to 10" long, radiate outward from the crown to form a dense clump of foliage with a very fine texture. The clumps grow 10-12 inches high with a similar spread, only very slowly expanding outward. Even in the snow the foliage remains mostly upright, providing winter interest.

Helictotrichon sempervirens – Blue Oat Grass: Graceful fountains of silver-blue blades form neat ornamental clumps that combine well with other grasses. Beige to light brown terminal panicles appear June through August. Reliable and attractive accent or specimen, perfect for rock gardens. Evergreen perennial. Deer resistant, full sun, moderate growth rate. Gets 2 – 3 feet tall and wide. Provide regular watering.

Melinus nerviglumis – Ruby Grass: A small semi-evergreen cool-season grass from S. Africa that has blue-green foliage and forms a 1 foot tall clump. In the fall the foliage turns purplish-red. The showy pink flowers bloom a foot above the foliage in the spring and summer and spent flowers are still attractive into winter. Best in full sun with regular water but tolerates considerable dryness.

Miscanthus sinensis 'Zebrinus' – Zebra Grass: Zebra grass is a clump-forming grass noted for its horizontally banded foliage. Easily grown in average, medium, well-drained soil in full sun to part shade. Tolerant of a wide range of soils but prefers moist soils. Best in full sun. Less vigorous with decreased flowering and tendency to flop in too much shade. Tolerant of summer heat. Clumps slowly expand in circumference by short rhizomes, but retain tight clump shape. Foliage should be left standing throughout the winter for visual interest and to provide protection for the crowns. Cut foliage to the ground in late winter just before new shoots appear. 5' – 8' tall.

Miscanthus transmorrisonensis – Evergreen Maiden Grass: Fluffy spikes arching above the foliage make a great plant for mass plantings or large containers. In mild climates, the flowers remain showy from spring through early fall. Evergreen. Year-round interest. Grows fast in full or partial sun to 3 to 4 feet tall and wide. Blooms April thru fall.

Muhlenbergia emersleyi – El Toro Bull Grass: An evergreen clumping grass with blue-green foliage to about 2-3 feet tall and wide, smaller and more dense than Deer grass (*Muhlenbergia rigens*) with slightly wider leaves. In fall appear the loose spikes with dark purple flowers rising above the foliage. Very drought tolerant. Plant in full sun or part shade in well-drained soil. It is hardy to 0° F. (USDA Zone 7). This beautiful grass is native to rocky slopes in oak woodlands from Arizona to Texas south into Mexico.

Muhlenbergia lindheimeri – Lindheimer's Muhly: Native to Mexico and Texas this stunning clump forming grass is winter dormant grass in cold climates, but usually semi-deciduous in mild climates. From the fall into winter emerge the 5 ft tall upright flower inflorescence that rise well above the blue-gray foliage. The flowers are at first purple then mature to a gray color. Best in full sun with regular watering but will tolerate drought and light shade. Tolerant of many different types of soils. Reportedly tolerant of ocean spray and saline soils. Is attractive if left unmanaged but can also be cut back to 1 foot tall or raked hard in spring to remove old leaves and flowers.

Muhlenbergia rigens – Deergrass: Heat and drought tolerant, this hardy native grass displays stiff, narrow purple spikes above the mounding foliage. A compact alternative to Pampas Grass without the sharp leaf edges and aggressive reseeding. Beautiful in mass plantings and effective erosion control. An essential for the native and wild garden for wildlife habitat. Needs little water once established. Grow in full or partial sun. Gets 3 – 5' tall with a moderate growth rate. Blooms in fall.

Ophiopogon planiscapens 'Nigricans' – Black Mondo Grass: A slow growing evergreen perennial with black grass-like leaves. It can grow to 8 inches tall by 1 foot wide with individual leaves 10 inches long and less than 1/4 inch wide with new growth very dark green towards the base of the leaves and darkening towards the tips to become one the blackest plants that we know of. Clusters of spikes on which whitish lilac flowers appear in summer and are often followed by dark, nearly black berries in fall. Best in part sun or light shade, with regular watering.

Pennisetum 'Cherry Sparkler' – Cherry Sparkler Pennisetum: characterized by its variegated foliage with distinct longitudinal stripes that are creamy white and green in color and flushed with pink when exposed to full sun with greater expression of the pink flush when growing in cooler temperatures, its height of 91 to 102 cm, and its blooms that open burgundy in color.

Pennisetum 'Fairy Tails' – Evergreen Fountain Grass: An evergreen fountain grass that was discovered at John Greenlee's Pomona nursery. This plant forms 2 to 3 foot wide clumps with upright foliage to 4 feet tall and dark wheat colored blooms rising above the foliage in spring and summer. Plant in full sun. Height can be curtailed some by careful irrigation. Should prove hardy and evergreen to 20-25° F and possibly root hardy below this.

Pennisetum orientale – Oriental Fountain Grass: A compact fine textured winter dormant grass to 18 inches tall with light green foliage and soft feathery pale pink flower spikes rising above the foliage from late spring through fall. It is a slow spreading rhizomatous grass which forms dense clumps. Plant in full sun in a well-drained soil. Looks best with occasional watering but tolerates drier conditions as well. Hardy to around -10° F and useful to USDA Zone 6. Cut back in fall winter. Useful as a standalone specimen or in mass plantings - great for edging a path and particularly nice when backlit. This plant is native to central and southwest Asia to north -western India.

Pennisetum 'Red Bunny Tails' – Red Bunny Tails Fountain Grass: This annual produces deep reddish-black flowers that resemble rabbits' tails. Flowers persist throughout the season. This plant forms an evergreen clump of green foliage with burgundy highlights, 2 feet high and 3 feet wide. Grow in light, average, well-drained soil in full sun. Cut back previous year's foliage by early spring where hardy.

Pennisetum 'Red Riding Hood' – Red Riding Hood Fountain Grass: This evergreen to semi-evergreen grass has foliage that grows 18 to 24 inches tall and has narrow red tinged bronze foliage and reddish brown flower plumes that rise above the foliage to about 30 inches tall. It is smaller and finer textured plant than Red Fountain Grass, Pennisetum 'x advena 'Rubrum' but also has greener foliage. Plant in full sun and irrigate little to occasionally. Evergreen in frost free gardens and root hardy to 20-25 degrees.

Pennisetum setaceum 'Rubrum' – Purple Fountain Grass: Popular, drought tolerant grass forms neat clumps of purplish maroon blades. Topped by rose red flower spikes summer through fall. Beautiful as a landscape specimen or planted in groups. Provides quick annual color in any climate. Perennial in warm climates. Moderate growth rate and narrow habit. Grows to 4' high and 3' wide. Blooms summer through fall.

Pennisetum setaceum 'Sterile Green' – Sterile Fountain Grass: Upright, arching leaves to 3' in height. Full sun and does well in coastal conditions. Seed heads are said to be sterile.

Pennisetum 'Skyrocket' – Skyrocket Pennisetum: Green leaves with white striped margin form an attractive vase-like clump. Blooms rise above the plant, appearing as smoky pink plumes that turn cream as they age. Because the plumes are sterile, blooms continue from midsummer through mid-fall. Fast growth rate and produces blooms in summer and fall. Gets 3' tall and wide.

Pennisetum spathiolatum – Slender Veldt Grass: A evergreen to semi-evergreen plant that produces clumps of fine textured dark green narrow foliage that mounds to 18 inches tall. In late spring to late summer arise in abundance the vertical tall wiry flower stalks to 3 to 4 feet tall and terminate in tight elongated spikes of tan colored flowers that seem to dance unattached high above the foliage. Plant in full to part sun in a fairly well drained soil. Requires little irrigation but responds well to occasional watering. Hardy and mostly evergreen in mild climates and root hardy to USDA Zone 7 (0-10° F). Cut back in late winter to early spring prior to the first flush of growth.

Phormium sp. – New Zealand Flax: Tough, large grassy clumps to 6-8' tall from New Zealand. Great plants which make a bold statement in the landscape. Our South Bay Botanic Garden showcases 10 different dwarf varieties located in the rear of Monocot Meadow:

'Apricot Queen' - New apricot-colored leaves provide contrast with the green-margined, pale yellow mature foliage. Use as an accent, specimen, container plant or backdrop to add unique color and texture to the landscape. Foliage great for cut arrangements. Evergreen. 3' - 4' tall, 4' - 5' wide.

'Cream Delight' - Dramatic foliage that has green margins edged with red, and a creamy yellow midstripe. Adds dramatic color to the landscape year-round. Use as an accent, mass planting or container plant to add unique color and texture to the landscape. Evergreen. 2' - 3' tall, 3' - 4' wide.

'Dusky Chief' - New Zealand Flax cultivar that grows upright to 3-4 feet tall with 1 1/2" wide maroon red foliage that curves gracefully at tips. Older foliage turns more bronze colored. Plant in full sun to light shade. Can tolerate fairly dry conditions (Coastal) but looks best with occasional to regular irrigation. Hardy to 15-20 F.

'Jack Spratt' - Attractive, neat clumps of burgundy-bronze sword-like leaves make this dwarf plant a stunning accent. Useful for edging, mass plantings and textural accents. Fire resistant. Evergreen perennial. 18" tall and wide.

Phormium sp. – New Zealand Flax: (continued)

'Jester' - New Zealand Flax cultivar that grows to only 18 inches tall with slightly arching 2- 3 feet long pinkish leaves that has an orange midrib and lime green bands near the leaf margins. Plant in full sun to light shade. Can tolerate fairly dry conditions (coastal) but looks best with occasional to regular irrigation. Hardy to 15-20 F. A very interesting color combination but seems weaker than most other cultivars - tends to revert to green.

'Maori Maiden' - Grows to 18 inches to 2 feet tall with slightly arching 1 1/2" wide apricot-pink to rose-red colored leaves with thin green margins. Plant in full sun to light shade - may sun burn in full sun in Southern California. Can tolerate fairly dry conditions (Coastal) but looks best with occasional to regular irrigation. Hardy to 15-20 F. Can have foliage reversion that are bronze colored and grow more erect and taller than the pink foliage - trim off to maintain good color. This cultivar is the flax most prone to sun burn so careful placement in the garden is necessary - avoid sites with reflected heat and plant in light shade or morning sun in southern California. The pinkest of the flax and probably the most beautiful if maintained.

'Pink Stripe' - Grows upright to 5- 6 feet tall with 2 - 3" wide bronze-green (almost gray) leaves edged with pink. Plant in full sun to light shade. Can tolerate fairly dry conditions (Coastal) but looks best with occasional to regular irrigation. Hardy to 15-20 F. A nice fairly newer cultivar from South Africa. Pink edges fade in late summer - trim out foliage to enhance the new showy leaves.

'Rainbow Warrior' - Evergreen leaves are long, narrow, and grow upright. Clusters of flowers grow on spikes above the foliage in late spring and summer. 'Rainbow Warrior' grows 3'-4' tall, 5'-6' wide. Leaves are darker salmon, turning cream as they age. Foliage turns deep red in winter.

'Tom Thumb' - grows to 2 feet tall with slightly arching undulating 1/2" wide green leaves with red bronze margins and a dark mid-rib. Our smallest green flax. Plant in full sun to light shade. Can tolerate fairly dry conditions (coastal) but looks best with occasional to regular irrigation. Hardy to 15-20 F. Slightly larger, greener and hardier than the cultivar 'Jack Spratt'.

'Yellow Wave' - Grows to 3-4 feet tall with arching 2 inch wide leaves that have a central yellow band that is brighter when first emerging and fades to yellow-green by fall. Plant is wider than tall. Plant in full sun to light shade. Can tolerate fairly dry conditions (Coastal) but looks best with occasional to regular irrigation. Hardy to 15-20 F. Prune out green foliage fans at base of plant to maintain yellow color.

Scirpus cernuus – Fiber Optic Grass: A very attractive glasslike, rush relative growing to 8 inches tall with bright green evergreen foliage. Plant in part shade to full sun along the coast, directly in water at a depth of 2 in. or at the water's edge. Useful singularly, in mass or as a ground cover. In the summer, attractive dark brown small flowers appear at the end of each stem and contrast well with the foliage. Cut back yearly for fresh new growth. Some call this plant Fiber Optics Grass (quite descriptive!) and Bulrush is sometimes spelled Bullrush.

Sesleria autumnalis – Autumn Moor Grass: An evergreen clumping grass that forms neat pale green tussocks (1-1 1/2 feet tall) from which emerge tight golden flower spikes in spring which fade gracefully through summer and fall. Blades are narrow and light green with scabrous margins. Tolerates a wide range of conditions - wet to dry, sun to shade. Frost hardy. A beautiful meadow grass that is well maintained and does not reseed in the garden.

Sesleria caerulea – Blue Moor Grass: Evergreen clumping grass to 1 foot tall with bicolor leaves: The upper side is a rich green; the underside a bluish-white, giving the plant a blue cast. A slow spreader. Purple flower spikes bloom in spring. Excellent ground cover in sun or part shade. Prefers regular garden water.

Sesleria nitida – Blue Bristle Grass: Very adaptable, all-around grass, with a slight bluish tone, forming a low-growing mound (18" by 12") of bristly, narrow, grass blades. Makes a good choice for the landscape, with our current water conservation concerns, as it does well in both moist and dry conditions. Takes sun or partial shade. Gets wheat colored tassels mid summer. Hardy to the low 20s. This specimen is a great substitute for Blue Fescue Grass with none of its inherent problems in the landscape.

Stenotaphrum secundatum – St. Augustine Grass: St. Augustinegrass, along with bermudagrass and zoysiagrass, is a warm-season turfgrass. In areas where it is well adapted, it is water efficient and has few pest problems. St. Augustinegrass is used in the most moderate California climate zones, along the Southern California coast or in coastal valleys. It prefers full sun, but has a high tolerance for shade. It grows quickly during the summer months, but slows down during the spring and fall and enters a dormancy period in the late autumn and during the winter months. Because St. Augustinegrass is not wear tolerant, it is used for lawns and general-purpose turf, but not for high traffic sports turf. Moderate maintenance. St. Augustinegrass requires a high amount of nitrogen per year. It has a high tolerance for shade and heat but a poor tolerance for cold temperatures. It is drought and salt tolerant. Thatch is a severe problem. If not regularly dethatched, St. Augustinegrass can be difficult to mow.

Watsonia sp. – Bugle Lily: A deciduous winter growing plant with sword-like 2 1/2 ft long bright green pliable foliage and 4-5 feet tall showy wands of deep rose flower with a darker throat. Watsonia are showy plants in the Iris Family and are closely related to Gladiolus. Although often considered bulbs, they technically produce a corm and not a true bulb. Plant in a sunny location in early fall for late spring flowers. Little or no summer irrigation is required and plants situated in heavy soils will likely rot if given summer moisture. Dig and divide every 2-3 years for added vigor. Watsonia are good for the vase if cut ends are burnt soon after picking.

(Some descriptions obtained from Monrovia Nursery, San Marcos Growers, and Daylily Hill Nursery websites)