



Grasses in the Garden
by Sue McDavid
UCCE Master Gardener of El Dorado County

When we talk about grasses in the garden, we're not referring to the typical turf grasses that make up lawns, but rather ornamental grasses. These include both true grasses (*Poaceae*) and plants that have a grass-like appearance such as sedges and rushes. Fall is when they put on their best appearance, and the Ornamental Grasses Garden at our Sherwood Demonstration Garden is at its showiest right now.

The majority of ornamental grasses are perennials which live for two or more years. Their growth habits are either clumping or spreading. Clumping grasses grow larger in circumference, whereas spreading grasses expand rapidly by aboveground or underground stems. Be careful when planting the latter because many times, they are very aggressive spreaders that may overtake other desirable plantings.

How do you take care of ornamental grasses? First, they are one of the most maintenance-free plantings in a landscape. Once established, they tend to be fairly drought tolerant (although all plants need regular watering during their first season), and do best with drip irrigation; overhead watering frequently flattens them to the ground. Pests and diseases of ornamental grasses are uncommon, although rust can sometimes be a problem. Most ornamental grasses need very little fertilizer, and the need for it should be based on the results of a soil test. Too much nitrogen, especially, is not a good idea because it can lead to weak stems that will cause the grass to fall over.

Cut back grasses before the new season's growth begins. Late January or February is a good time for this. Since many grasses are attractive in the garden during winter and their dried seed heads

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are beneficial for birds, cutting back too early is not a good idea. When cutting back, stems should be left a few inches above ground level.

Most grasses should be divided every three to four years. If left for too long before dividing, they will eventually become thin or die out in the center. Most grasses have tough, vigorous root systems and may have to be divided with a shovel, saw or axe. Hose off the soil to make the roots easier to work with, then separate and replant the vigorous growth from the outer edges of the clump. Replant promptly and maintain regular moisture until the roots take hold.

There are many, many ornamental grasses to choose from, but some attractive choices include Feather Reed Grass (*Calamagrostis x acutiflora* 'Karl Foerster'), one of the most vertically-growing grasses; Oriental Fountain Grass (*Pennisetum orientale*), a medium-sized, vase-shaped grass; Common Blue Fescue (*Festuca glauca* 'Elijah Blue'), a low-growing grass good for edging or borders; and the dozens of *Miscanthus* varieties, large, attractive grasses that are often used as focal points in the garden. These are just a few of the many, many grasses to choose from, so try a few and be ready to become an ornamental grass enthusiast.

Master Gardeners continue to offer gardening classes on-line. Upcoming sessions include a live question-and-answer event (October 21) and classes on Putting Your Vineyard and Garden to Bed (October 31) and Shade Gardening (November 7 and 14). Please go to http://mgeldorado.ucanr.edu/Public_Education_Classes/ for registration instructions and to see all upcoming online classes.

Due to the pandemic, Master Gardener events will for the foreseeable future continue to be limited. Please see our calendar of events for learning opportunities. We realize our public classes are valued by County residents and we are doing our best to provide virtual learning opportunities.

The Sherwood Demonstration Garden, located at 6699 Campus Drive in Placerville, is open to the public, from 9 AM to noon on Fridays and Saturdays through October 31. State and county public health guidelines require us to limit visitors to ten at a time (including our docents) and ask that they practice social distancing and wear face coverings. Restrooms will not be open. Check http://mgeldorado.ucanr.edu/Demonstration_Garden for more information.

Have a gardening question? Master Gardeners are working hard remotely and can still answer your questions. Leave a message on our office telephone: 530-621-5512, or use the "Ask a Master Gardener" option on our website: mgeldorado.ucanr.edu. We'll get back to you! Master Gardeners are also on Facebook, Instagram, and Pinterest.

For more information on the UCCE Master Gardeners of El Dorado County, see our website at <http://mgeldorado.ucanr.edu>. To sign up for notices and newsletters, see http://ucanr.edu/master_gardener_e-news.