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THE NEED FOR GRASSES AND BAMBOOS

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The quintessential Japanese Garden was created by Buddhist monks. It resulted from their need to have an environment which aided rather than distracted them in their meditation. The garden they designed provided the ambience of timelessness with no evidence of seasonal change. These were composed of evergreens, rocks, and water. They are classically beautiful gardens. Since the early 1960s landscape design has been abysmally dull. The *raison d'être* of these designs is that they had to be managed with residual herbicides. Plant selection was limited to those resistant to simazine. We have now, as a monument to the abandonment of good design skills, the incongruous conifer and heather gardens suffocating in soils too sumptuous and rich for plants of such humble origin. Alternatively for amenity schemes we have pastures of *Potentilla*, carpets of *Cotoneaster*, and barriers of *Berberis*.

Designs such as these based exclusively on woody plants are stiff and unbending, lack movement, and do not have the lovely textural changes which can be effected through the use of a wider range of plants.

Grasses offer the perfect foil to the heavy rounded outline of shrubs and other plants. Grasses were seldom used in the great herbaceous borders. The accent was on flower colour, à la Gertrude Jekyll. Since the war the emphasis has been greater than ever on flowers, with breeding directed towards creating bigger and larger, and brighter and gaudier flowers—begonias and roses being just two examples.

Thankfully today there is increasing awareness of the value of plants versus just flamboyant flowers and so, as a result, grasses have come very much into their own. The more aesthetic landscape designers use them freely to add that different texture line and lightness to general planting schemes. There are many plants besides grasses that have a grassy effect, such as *Acorus*, *Crocasmia*,

Dierama, *Hemerocallis*, *Iris*, *Libertia*, *Liriope*, *Ophiopogon*, *Phormium*, *Sisyrinchium*, and *Yucca*. In this paper I deal only with the true grasses, sedges, and bamboos suitable for the small garden.

The larger grasses in moist ground emphasize, by way of contrast, the enormous leaves of *Gunnera*, *Peltiphyllum*, *Rheum*, and *Rodgersia*. However, with the size of our domestic gardens ever decreasing the smaller grasses are ideal modern plants for such locations.

Grasses can be divided into giants—over 1.5., those over 0.5m. and those less than 0.5 of a metre. The tallest plants include *Arundo donax*, *Cortaderia*, *Miscanthus*, and *Stipa gigantea*. We grow four cultivars of *Cortaderia selloana*: 'Gold Band', 'Pumila', 'Rendatleri', and 'Sunningdale Silver'. *Cortaderia fulvida* is the most graceful of all the pampas grasses, flowering in June. *Arundo donax* makes a giant plant as does *Miscanthus sacchariflorus*—3m. or more.

Smaller growing and more graceful grasses are *Miscanathus sinensis* 'Gracillimus' and the free-flowering 'Silver Feather'. The cultivar 'Zebrinus' has lovely horizontal markings on the stems.

MEDIUM SIZE GRASSES AND GRASS-LIKE PLANTS

Carex buchananii. This produces hundreds of rounded shiny, bright, reddish brown stems in a clump that is fountain shaped and does not spread. A unique colour among grasses. 60cm.

Chionochloa flavicans. (60cm × 60cm) A miniature pampas grass, in essence, with the same flower spikes produced in June.

Pennisetum alopecuroides and *P. alopecuroides* 'Woodside'. These are very free flowering grasses producing distinctive indigo bottle brush heads in September–October.

Phalaris arundinacea var. *picta* is a marvelous brightly variegated grass but is very invasive. It can be grown very successfully in a sunken barrel.

SMALL-SIZED GRASSES AND GRASS-LIKE PLANTS

Most of the grasses we grow are under 50cm in height and so are ideal small garden plants. The important ones are:

Acorus gramineus 'Variegatus' (20cm), is densely tufted, very hardy, small, brightly variegated and evergreen, but is not really a grass.

Alopecurus pratensis 'Aureus' (45cm). Leaves are entirely gold, making a vivid coloured clump. Hardy, and easy to grow in all but the driest soils.

Arrhenatherum elatius bulbosum 'Variegatum' (30cm). One of the brightest white striped grasses. Easy to suit in any soil, but has a spreading root system.

Carex morrowii 'Evergold' (30cm). This has been our best seller.

It is evergreen, brightly variegated and mushroom shaped. Very hardy.

Carex ornithopoda 'Variegata' is a much smaller grass at 15cm, forming a neat mounded tuft.

Carex siderostricta 'Variegata' has very broad leaves with variegated stripes, making a good feature plant at the front of the border.

Carex stricta 'Aurea' (30cm). A dramatic grass because of its wonderful colour. Ideal for sunny moist spots. Hardy and easy to grow and does not spread.

Dactylis glomerata 'Variegata', 25cm. in height with beautifully variegated foliage, tufted growth, and roots that do not spread. Thrives in dry, well-drained soils.

Festuca scoparia. This is a miniature, 10cm. in height. It produces a mat of bright green evergreen foliage. Ideal as a contrast plant at the front of the border.

Hakonechloa macra 'Aureola', 30cm. in height. A gorgeous multi-coloured grass from Japan which forms a neat clump and grows best in light shade.

Holcus mollis 'Variegatus'. This is another lovely brightly variegated dwarf grass which is 15cm. in height. Hardy and easy to grow in any soil.

Milium effusum 'Aureum', 30 cm. Keeps its clear golden foliage throughout the year, growing best in light shade and damp conditions.

Molinia caerulea 'Variegata'. This is one of the most graceful of all grasses, forming a neat vase shaped clump. Its airy and light habit make it an ideal contrast to the heavier round outlines of surrounding plants.

Stipa arundinacea, 45cm. An evergreen mass of matching foliage produces lovely 1m. tall flower spikes and has very good autumn colour. Grows best in heavy soils that do not dry out.

We have in stock approximately another 20 different grasses, but do not have these available in commercial quantities.

BAMBOOS

We supply garden centres exclusively, so we primarily select plants suitable for this market. The two most popular bamboos are *Arundinaria variegata* [syn. *Pleioblastus fortunei*], and *Arundinaria viridistriata* [syn. *Pleioblastus viridistriatus*]. Both are dwarf (1.3m.) and form neat clumps, variegated white and gold, respectively. Brightest in full sunshine. Both make excellent tub plants.

Sasa mirrezuzume, (30cm) in height. A very recent introduction from Japan. Light green foliage forms a dense carpet.

Sasa veitchii. (1.2m). This plant is invasive, but it is a very popular bamboo. The leaves are extra broad and the margins blanch

which gives a variegated effect. Ideal for large tubs.

Shibataea kumasasa. (0.8m). A very hardy and wind-resistant bamboo. Forms a tight, leafy clump. Does not spread. It is a very elegant dwarf bamboo, distinct in appearance from all others, with broad stubby leaves.

We also produce *Arundinaria japonica* 'Murielae', *A. nitida*, and the tiny but invasive *Arundinaria pygmaea*.

PROPAGATION

All our plants are grown from division, none from seed, so far. The evergreen grasses and sedges are divided in March, but the deciduous kinds and the bamboo are not touched until May or June when growth has commenced. Other plants are divided and the divisions potted into a peat-only compost, coarse grade, with 2-year Osmocote. The 9cm. pots in Empot carriers are set on a capillary bed in the glasshouse. Once established and growing well most of the grasses are moved and over-wintered outdoors on a well drained capillary bed.

In the following May, these plants are repotted into a 2 or 3 litre rigid pot in a coarse grade peat compost and grown on capillary beds.

The larger grasses, particularly the *Miscanthus*, are divided last. These are started in a 1 litre pot and then moved to a 3 or 4 litre pot. In this size container they make 3m growth in the season. Latterly, we have stopped making divisions of the named forms of *Cortaderia* as we find it is easier to buy micro-propagated plants which establish readily and go on to produce a very uniform crop.

All our capillary beds have a very positive winter drainage system and we feel that this is an important contributory factor to over-wintering grasses in their first year.

Most grasses are retailed in small pots 9cm or less. These are very difficult to manage and losses result. We grow all our plants in a minimum 2 litre pot size, which gives the retailer a much better product to manage and sell.