

RED BUTTE GARDEN

UTAH'S BOTANICAL GARDEN

Garden Plant Collections

Ornamental Grasses



Red Butte Garden's collection of ornamental grasses includes true grasses and other graminoid, or "grass-like" plants, such as sedges and rushes. They are all monocotyledons, or plants with only one embryonic leaf. Their flowers are produced on stalks rising from their narrow, sword-like foliage and can range from spikes of flowers held tightly to the stalk like Great Basin Wild Rye (*Leymus cinereus*), to open sprays of flowers like those in Switch Grasses (*Panicum* spp.) and Maidengrass (*Miscanthus* cvs.).

Ornamental grasses have been proven performers in Utah's tough range of climates, and have a myriad of uses in the landscape because of their diversity.

DESIGNING WITH GRASSES

Providing practically year-round interest, ornamental grasses are sadly often missing from many landscapes. Grasses enrich any garden design by adding elements of texture, height, shape, motion, sound, and light play. They look especially exceptional when backlit by the morning or evening sun.

Small to medium sized grasses can be used to soften the edge of a path or accent other plantings, such as perennials, broadleaf shrubs and conifers. Larger grasses can be used as screens, backdrops or as a focal point to make a bold statement. Grasses are particularly breathtaking when planted en masse, i.e., in a group.

Though grasses are typically considered full sun plants, there is an enormous palette available, including selections for part sun and shady locations. Shape and size change dramatically as the plants grow and flower. Foliage colors range from silver-blue, to yellow, green, maroon, red, and purple. Flower panicles, whether they are stiff, fluffy, delicate, or prominent are a standout when touched by frost or backlit by the sun, and remain attractive even during winter.

Some graminoid plants found at Red Butte Garden:

- *Carex comans* 'Amazon Mist' – New Zealand Hair Sedge
- *Panicum virgatum* 'Shenandoah' – Switch Grass
- *Schizachyrium scoparium* – Little Bluestem
- *Bouteloua gracilis* 'Blonde Ambition' - Blue Grama Grass
- *Festuca mairei* – Atlas Fescue

CARE AND MAINTENANCE

Grasses are resistant to most common garden pests and diseases and require little care. They are incredibly adaptable to the toughest site conditions. Some even tolerate salt and can be planted near roads, driveways, sidewalks, and patios.

- *Plant grasses in the spring or fall.*
- *For the first season or two check the soil regularly to make sure the ground does not dry out. Once established, water according to the specific grass's needs.*

- *Ornamental grasses tend to perform well without the addition of fertilizer. Instead, use a side dressing of compost to enhance the soil, conserve water, and suppress weeds.*
- *Cut all grasses back to about 2" to 4" tall in late winter or early spring, before new growth is expected. Grasses can be cut back in the fall but waiting till late winter or early spring not only provides winter interest, it helps insulate the crown during winter.*
- *Divide clumps in the spring or late fall if they become too large for the location or when the center of the clump dies out.*

DID YOU KNOW

Grasses are one of the most versatile life-forms on the planet. Evolving almost 55 million years ago, they have had plenty of time to adapt to just about every growing condition possible. Grasslands cover approximately 20 percent of Earth's land surface.

The relationship between humans and grass has a long and complex past. Historically, every component of a grass plant has been used by humans for food, clothing, housing, fragrance, fibers, musical instruments, or as fodder for animals.

All grasses, annual or perennial, are categorized as either "warm" or "cool" season grasses. Cool season grasses put on growth early in the spring, and generally bloom in early summer. Warm season grasses begin their growth in early summer and bloom mid- to late summer.

Some grasses are considered invasive. Cheatgrass (*Bromus tectorum*) is a cool season grass now found throughout most of Utah and partly responsible for increased wildfires because its foliage dries in early summer, adding to the fuel load. Some species of Fountain Grass (*Pennisetum*) are being recognized as invasive in the southwest. If using a perennial Fountain Grass, be sure to select sterile cultivars.

Grasses are habitat for predatory beetles, i.e., beetles that feed on insect pests.

WHERE TO SEE THIS COLLECTION

Ornamental Grasses are planted throughout Red Butte Garden. To view large undulating swathes, be sure to walk through the Four Seasons Garden. Grasses used as accent, companion, or as groundcover plantings are found throughout the Terrace Gardens and along the Floral Walk. Explore plantings near the Water Pavilion ponds for a wide variety of grass shapes and sizes. The Wildflower Meadow represents predominately native grasses in a more natural habitat. Don't forget to walk the Natural Area trails to discover how grasses knit together native plant communities.

