

## Ornamental Grass Varieties and Care

### Cool Season Grasses

Cool season grasses start growing in very early spring and can maintain nice healthy foliage all season long and even into the winter if it is mild. In our Oregon summers, when temperatures rise and moisture levels drop, cool season grasses can lose their vigor without sufficient irrigation but will pick back up when it cools off.

#### Maintenance and Care

Since cool season grasses can handle milder temperatures, they tend to look good and can sometime stay semi-evergreen throughout the winter months. They do not need to be pruned till very early spring. If they are pruned too late in the spring the newly emerging foliage can be damaged, resulting in poor growth. If they stayed semi ever- green over the winter only prune out the dead brown foliage in the spring. Cool season grasses need to be divided in spring or fall when they are actively growing.

#### Pruning Heights

Larger Grasses (Over 3 Feet Tall): Prune down to 6" with hedge shears  
Smaller Grasses (Under 3 Feet Tall): Prune down to 3" with hedge shears

### Warm Season Grasses

Warm season grasses start growing in later spring, so late in fact that people often mistake them as dead. They thrive in warmer temperatures, and thus tend to do well in a drought tolerant garden. In our cool wet PNW winter months, they can look unkempt and unattractive.

#### Maintenance and Care

Warm season grasses can be pruned in the fall when they are starting to look unattractive, but can also be pruned back up until mid-spring. Division of warm season grasses should take place in spring through midsummer when they are actively growing.

#### Pruning Heights

Larger Grasses (Over 3 Feet Tall): Prune down to 6" with hedge shears  
Smaller Grasses (Under 3 Feet Tall): Prune down to 3" with hedge shears

### Evergreen

These grass-like plants stay evergreen all year round and tend to do well in more moist and shady environments.

#### Maintenance and Care

Evergreen species do not need to be pruned back, but can be selectively pruned if they are losing vigor. Prune out dead and dying foliage. Since evergreen species never go dormant it is best to divide and prune them in the spring when they are more actively growing and vigorous.

## Grass Varieties

**Cool Season:** Fescues, Blue Oat Grass (*Helictotrichon*), Tufted Hair Grass (*Deschampsia*), Feather Reed Grass (*Calamagrostis*) and Autumn Moor Grass (*Sesleria*).

**Warm Season:** Northern Sea Oats (*Chasmanthium*), Maiden Grass (*Miscanthus* sp.), Hardy Pampas Grass (*Erianthus*), Perennial Fountain Grass (*Pennisetum*), Switch Grass (*Panicum*) and Prairie Cord Grass (*Spartina*).

**Grass like Evergreen:** Sedges (*Carex*), Lily Turf (*Liriope*), Mondo Grass (*Ophiopogon*), and Sweet Flag (*Acorus*)

## When and How to Divide Grasses

Grasses should be divided roughly every few years to maintain vigor. Dividing preferably takes place before die out occurs in the center, but can still be done if it occurs and should be divided that year. Dividing should be done when the grass is actively growing, but not while flowering. Dividing is done at different times of the year depending on the type of grass. Cool season grasses usually need to be divided more often than warm season grasses.

When it is time to divide, the task can be daunting, but preparing yourself with the right tools will help drastically. For smaller grass clumps a sharp spade should suffice. The larger the clump, and the larger the variety the larger or sharper the tool is needed. For really large grasses like Pampas grass or the larger Maiden grass species, a chainsaw is sometimes needed. The grass clump can be completely dug up and divided (usually easiest with the larger varieties) or can be divided by selecting portions off in the ground. A portion of the outer part of the clump (which is the most actively growing) should be included when the grass is being divided. The grass roots should not be allowed to dry out when dividing. When division has successfully occurred, the dead roots should be pruned away and the divisions should be planted shortly after.