

Ornamental Grass Display Garden Hancock Research Center

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The ornamental grass display garden was first established in the spring of 1995. The majority of the plants were obtained as 3" container-grown divisions. Ornamental grasses often take a year or two to fill into their locations even when started from larger (e.g. gallon-sized) plants. Thus, the small size of the starting material will even further lengthen the time to maturity for the garden. Nonetheless, a number of the grasses have started to fill out nicely by the middle of the summer of 1996.

The winter of 1995-96 was particularly hard for herbaceous perennials since there were extended periods when there was no snow cover yet temperatures fell well below zero. In combination with the high exposure of the site and small starting material, the cold temperatures killed a number of grasses that normally are considered quite hardy in Michigan, namely *Miscanthus sinensis zebrinus* (Zebra Grass), *Miscanthus sinensis gracillimus* (Japanese Silver Grass) and *Miscanthus sinensis purpurascens*. Most but not all individuals of these species were lost. We also suffered losses of *Pennisetum alopecuroides* (Fountain Grass), which has a tendency to be marginally hardy in Michigan. We replanted several of the grasses in the early summer of 1996.

Following is a list of the Ornamental grasses and a few notes on performance for the past two seasons. Brief descriptions of the grasses are given on the next pages.

Miscanthus sinensis zebrinus

Zebra Grass

Zebra Grass usually establishes over a two to three year period and is considered very hardy. However, we lost several plants the first winter and replacements were necessary.

Miscanthus sinensis gracillimus

Japanese Silver Grass

Gracillimus is very hardy but almost all the small plants were lost this last winter at the Hancock center. At the display gardens on campus, we didn't lose even one plant. Perhaps the high wind exposure was the culprit.

Miscanthus sinensis variegatus

Variegated Japanese Silver Grass

Most of these plants started slow but are establishing well by the middle of the second summer. Normally, variegated *Miscanthus* develops into full size over a two to three year period. The specimens in the display garden may take an extra year since they were pretty small when planted. The variegated *Miscanthus* looks very nice next to Black-eyed Susan. On campus, we have it planted next to Joe-Pye Weed (about 8 feet tall native plant that blooms in August).

Miscanthus sinensis 'Morning Light'

Morning Light Silver Grass

The Morning Light has been quite slow to get started. Most survived the first winter and are just now starting to take off. This grass has narrow, variegated foliage and makes a very graceful focal point for a display garden.

Miscanthus sinensis 'Sarabande'

Sarabande Silver Grass

This *Miscanthus* survived the first winter and has finally started to take off this summer. Should be a fine specimen by next year. The fine-textured foliage is particularly attractive. Some consider this to be the finest *Miscanthus* available.

Miscanthus sinensis 'Silberfeder' Silberfeder Silver Grass

A somewhat coarse form of *Miscanthus*, Sarabande has established quite quickly. This grass really shows off when it goes into flower in late August/September. The flower heads will be 8-12 feet tall, silver and very showy in the sunlight.

Miscanthus sinensis purpurascens Purple-leafed Silver Grass

The small starting material has been a challenge! Many died this last winter and the rest were very slow. Some larger divisions were planted this spring and they have really taken off well. This plant shows off in the fall.

Calamagrostis acutifolia 'Karl Foerster' Feather Reed Grass

This plant will obviously take a couple seasons to establish from the small starting material. However, once established, this is one of the best of the ornamental grasses. It blooms in July and holds the flower heads right through the winter.

Pennisetum alopecuroides Fountain Grass

Pennisetum alopecuroides 'Hameln' Dwarf Fountain Grass

Both the dwarf and regular Fountain Grasses had a rough winter. Most were replaced early this summer and are just beginning to fill in. They are a very graceful grass when in flower.

Molinia caerulea arundinacea 'Skyracer' Tall Purple Moor Grass

One specimen was planted this year in early summer. It suffered a bit when not watered during an extended period without rain. It should be able to withstand water stress once established. This tall, airy grass should still look good by next year.

Panicum virgatum 'Heavy Metal' Switch Grass

One specimen was planted this year in early summer. It suffered a bit when not watered during an extended period without rain. It should be able to withstand water stress once established.

Phalaris arundinacea picta Ribbon Grass

This grass can be a bit of a weed since it spreads by underground runners. I will say it looks great this summer! Very good for a shady area since it is a bright, aggressive plant.

Festuca ovina glauca 'Elijah Blue' Blue Fescue

Blue Fescues have a hard time competing with weeds as a rule in Mid-Michigan. They need very good drainage and a broad-leaf herbicide. The Blue fescue in the Display Garden is doing ok this summer.

Herbaceous Perennials Planted in the Display Garden

Several herbaceous perennials were planted amongst the ornamental grasses to give you an idea of some combinations that might be worth consideration.

Genus, species, cultivar	Common Name
Achillea 'Anthea'	Anthea Yarrow
Aster 'Purple Dome'	Purple Dome Aster
Campanula carpatica 'Blue Clips'	Campanula
Coreopsis 'Sunray'	Tickseed
Coreopsis verticillata 'Moonbeam'	Moonbeam Coreopsis
Lavandula angustifolia 'Munstead'	Lavender
Perovskia atriplicifolia	Russian Sage
Perovskia atriplicifolia 'Filigran'	Filigran Russian Sage
Physostegia virginiana	Obedient Plant
Rudbeckia fulgida 'Goldsturm'	Black-eyed Susan
Salvia superba 'Blue Queen'	Blue Queen Salvia
Sedum 'Autumn Joy'	Autumn Joy Sedum
Veronica 'Red Fox'	Red Fox Veronica