

# Unusual Grasses Need Special Care

By Doug Brede

In past issues of *TurfGrass Trends*, we've looked at oddball, rarely used grasses that have bona fide applications to mowed turf. The grasses we've covered have niche functions for sites where ordinary lawn grasses — bluegrass, bermudagrass and the like — won't persist due to drought, shade, salt and so on. This installment looks at a different function for these unconventional grasses: as ornamental landscape plants.

Ornamental grasses have received a lot of coverage in the landscape and gardening periodicals in recent years. You've undoubtedly viewed vivid photographs of the 300 individual varieties of *Miscanthus*, fountaingrass and pampasgrass available and read about their care.

*Eulalia*, fountaingrass and pampasgrass are vegetatively propagated grasses, meaning that shoot cuttings are taken from a mother plant to start new daughter plants. Vegetative grasses are container-grown in nurseries, similar to how herbaceous and woody ornamentals are produced. This tedious process is necessary to perpetuate the interesting colors, textures or variegations of the original.

## Seed-grown ornamentals

In this article, however, we're going to look at ornamental grasses that can be sown from seed, minimizing their establishment cost. They can be direct-sown with a drill or broadcast seeder. With specialized grasses, you can sow starter plants in the greenhouse and later transplant them as needed.

Nearly all grasses produce viable seed. (The notable exceptions are a few tropical grasses that are essentially seedless.) Seed produced from variegated or colorful clonal varieties generally do not breed true-to-type. In other words, the offspring do not resemble the mother.

For example, let's say you go down to your local nursery and purchase a potted plant of Heavy Metal switchgrass. Switchgrass is a seed-

propagated native grass, and the variety Heavy Metal has interesting steely-blue upright foliage.

In the early fall, you can strip mature seeds from the heads of switchgrass and sow them into greenhouse flats. Each seed, over a period of months, will produce its own ornamental clump of grass. Trouble is, only a percentage of the offspring will possess the interesting metallic appearance of the mother. Most will revert to the look of common switchgrass. Not that that's unattractive, but it won't possess the star power to be the focal point of a flower garden.

The focus of this article, however, is on the ornamental grasses that can be grown successfully from seed. These ornamentals may not have the show-stopping appeal of a mature, clonal mound of dwarf pampasgrass. But they do have attributes the clonals lack: Seeded ornamental grasses can be sown over large expanses, such as outer roughs of golf courses and virtually anywhere foot traffic and upkeep are at a minimum. The cost of obtaining and sowing the seed is usually the smallest part of the establishment process.

## Selection

Ornamental grass planting requires a bit more preplanning than normal turfgrass establishment. One reason is the number and diversity of species available. Figure 3 lists ornamental grasses that can be sown from seed. Seeds of most of these grasses are available regularly at reasonable prices. However, seeds of certain highly prized grasses can be expensive. They might need to be obtained from heirloom or native seed sources, where the seed is harvested from the wilds by hand. It's not unheard of to discover prices of \$200 per pound being charged for one-of-a-kind seed.

The next obstacle is matching heights and zones. Many of the most attractive ornamental grasses lack winter-hardiness. They persist a year or even two in the north, but they finally succumb to a harsh winter. Therefore, if you're in a Northern location, you'll want to consult

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## FIGURE 2

### Seed sources of ornamental grasses

#### ■ Arkansas Valley Seed Solutions

4625 Colorado Blvd.  
Denver, Colo., 80216  
877-957-3337  
[www.seedolutions.com/seed.cfm](http://www.seedolutions.com/seed.cfm)

#### ■ Ernst Conservation Seeds

9006 Mercer Pike  
Meadville, Pa. 16335  
814-336-2404  
[www.ernstseed.com/Pricelist/nativerereclamation.htm](http://www.ernstseed.com/Pricelist/nativerereclamation.htm)

#### ■ Granite Seed

1697 West 2100 North  
Lehi, Utah 84043  
801-768-4422  
[www.graniteseed.com/species/index.html](http://www.graniteseed.com/species/index.html)

#### ■ Jacklin Seed/Simplot

W. 5300 Riverbend Ave.  
Post Falls, Idaho 83854  
800-688-7333, ext. 212  
[www.jacklin.com](http://www.jacklin.com)

#### ■ S&S Seeds

P.O. Box 1275  
Carpinteria, Calif. 93014-1275  
805-684-0436  
[www.ssseeds.com/reclamation\\_mixes.html](http://www.ssseeds.com/reclamation_mixes.html)

#### ■ Seeds Etc.

17-92nd St. N.W.  
Marysville, Wash. 98271  
360-659-6889  
[www.seedsetc.com/grasses.htm](http://www.seedsetc.com/grasses.htm)

#### ■ Sharp Bros. Seed Co.

202 S. Sycamore  
Healy, Kan. 67850  
620-398-2231  
[www.sharpseed.com](http://www.sharpseed.com)

#### ■ Sunmark Seeds International

845 NW Dunbar Ave. #101  
Troutdale, Ore. 97060  
888-214-7333  
[www.sunmarkseeds.com/natgrass.htm](http://www.sunmarkseeds.com/natgrass.htm)

#### ■ The GreenWeb Co.

P.O. Box 1657  
Glendale, Calif. 91209  
Fax: 866-557-9736  
[www.boldweb.com/greenweb/orngress.htm](http://www.boldweb.com/greenweb/orngress.htm)

*\*Note that most of these companies sell in 25-pound quantities or more. Many, but not all, will fill mail orders. A few have convenient online ordering mechanisms on their Web sites.*

the zone numbers listed in the table (note these zones are *not* the same as U.S. Department of Agriculture zones).

Ornamental grasses are prized for their attractive seedheads. Grass seedstalks are most colorful during their pollination period, generally in the middle of the summer. After pollination, colors fade to a straw brown by autumn. By carefully crafting the species mix, it's possible to have something blooming from May to early September, as swirls of color jump from plant to plant.

### Establishment

Whenever I give speeches on ornamental grasses, the No. 1 question I'm asked is: "How do I get the grasses to look 'clumpy?'" The answer to that question is not simple. By their very nature, grasses want to form clumps, but the agronomics of accomplishing this feat are challenging.

One way it can be done is by lowering the seeding rate. Most turfgrass species are sown at rates in excess of 100 pounds per acre. The best seeding rate for ornamental grasses, to achieve the clumpy look, is 10 pounds per acre.

The problem at this seeding rate, as you might have guessed, is, "What grows in the spaces between clumps?" The answer, of course, is weeds.

Eliminating weeds is an annual routine with ornamental grasses. If your grass mix is all cool-season or all warm-season grasses, there are selective preplant herbicides that can be used to thwart weeds from taking over these rather slow-growing ornamentals. I'm not aware of any preplant herbicides that work with mixtures of cool- and warm-season grasses. Broadleaf weeds in ornamental grass areas can be remedied by a once-yearly application of phenoxy herbicide. Perennial grassy weeds are another story.

Volunteer bermudagrass in the South or quackgrass in the North can be the worst enemy of ornamental areas. These noxious grasses must be controlled before planting.

Some seed companies add companion grasses to their ornamental grass mix to help compete against weeds. The idea of a companion or nurse grass is to provide a temporary, fast growing grass to nurse along a slower moving ornamental until it eventually fills the stand.

In a study at The Ohio State University, researcher Michael Knee (1999) found that "the inclusion of annuals and fast-maturing perennials in mixes [with ornamental grasses] makes them attractive in the early stages of establishment, but may add to the competitive pressure on slower-growing perennials. Grasses seem to be particularly vulnerable to competition early in establishment. Mixtures based on short grasses seem to be particularly difficult to establish, and it appears to be more important to match the species to the moisture status of the site."

In other words, you may be better off in the long run without the companion.

Ornamental grasses can be sown using conventional planting tools, such as drills, drop spreaders or spinners. Grasses with large awns or very cottony seed are best planted through a hydroseeder. Bear in mind that if you sow them in straight lines, these grasses will emerge and grow in straight lines, which is not the look of grasses in the wilds. It may take a little coaxing to get your tractor driver to curve and meander to get the natural look you desire.

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### QUICK TIP

Winter Decline is a combination of disease pressure and everyday winter environmental stresses, such as snow, ice and winter play. Superintendents can reduce the impact of Winter Decline with fall applications of Chipco® Signature® Fungicide, 26GT® Fungicide and ProStar® Fungicide from Bayer Environmental Science.

FIG. 3

## Ornamental grasses that can be grown from seed

See footnote for seed cost and zone information.

Grass	Height (feet)	Seed cost*	Bloom month	Zone*	Cool/Warm-season grass	Remarks
<b>Very tall grasses</b>						
<b>Eastern amagras</b> <i>Tripsacum dactyloides</i>	7	2	7	3,4,5	W	Widespread grass of the American tallgrass prairie. Wide cornlike leaves. An interesting, persistent background grass for ornamental plantings.
<b>Mammoth wildrye</b> <i>Leymus racemosus</i>	6	2	8	1,3,6	C	Useful for stabilization of dunes, rocky slopes. Spreading rhizomes may be invasive into other plantings. Produces variable plant forms from seed. Blue-gray, 1.5-cm-wide leaves.
<b>Beardless wildrye</b> <i>Leymus triticoides</i>	6	2	7	1,2,3,6	C	A tall, background grass that prefers moist sites. Brown to gray winter color. Bearded wildrye is considered a variant of this species.
<b>Basin wildrye</b> <i>Leymus cinereus</i>	6	2	7	1,2,6	C	Attractive ornamental grass with a distinctive blue color. Drought tolerant, good soil binder.
<b>Prairie cordgrass</b> <i>Spartina pectinata</i> Link	6	4	7	1,2,3,4,6	W	Shiny saw-edged leaves with yellow edges. Grows through thick, scaly rootstocks with dense, wide, rough-edged basal foliage. Interesting seed spikes made up of 40 paired spikelets on one side of spike with bristly awns.
<b>Tall grasses</b>						
<b>Tall wheatgrass</b> <i>Thinopyrum ponticum</i> (Podp.)	5	1	7	1,6	C	Tall, coarse prairiegrass, useful as a natural windbreak or snow fence. Strongly blue colored under alkali or drought stress. Remains green six weeks longer into summer than other wheatgrasses. Provides excellent nesting and cover for birds.
<b>Switchgrass</b> <i>Panicum virgatum</i> L.	5	2	8	1,3,4,5	W	Classic prairiegrass useful for recreating a tallgrass prairie appearance. Feathery green to pink flowers. Grows primarily in clumps, often with reddish-purple bases.
<b>Indiangrass</b> <i>Sorghastrum nutans</i> (L.)	5	2	8	1,3,4,5	W	Beautiful ornamental prairiegrass with rather undistinguished foliage, but showy, medium-sized white plumes. Medium spring green-up rate. Relatively slow establishment.
<b>Big bluestem</b> <i>Andropogon gerardi</i>	5	2	8	1,3,4,5	W	Classic, tall prairie grass. Purple and yellow seedheads. Bluish green stems that turn purple in winter.
<b>Russian wildrye</b> <i>Psathyrostachys juncea</i>	4	2	6	1,2,6	C	Striking, bushy ornamental rangegrass. Drought, elevation tolerant. Some shade tolerance. Slow to establish.
<b>Canada wildrye</b> <i>Elymus canadensis</i> L.	4	3	7	1,2,3,6	C	A useful grass for soil stabilization under adverse conditions. Widely adapted to a range of soils. Quick establishment. Attractive arching foliage.
<b>Bluebunch wheatgrass</b> <i>Pseudoroegneria spicata</i> ssp. <i>spicata</i>	4	2	7	1,2,3	C	Tolerates slopes, elevation and poor soil. Does well on coarse-textured soils or deep well-drained loams. Weakened by constant mowing, particularly when flowering.
<b>Smilo grass</b> <i>Piptatherum miliaceum</i> (L.)	4	2	5	2,3,4	C	Stout, vigorous, erect grass with a decumbent base. Adapted to a Mediterranean climate, where it may naturalize and escape. Greens up in spring when moisture is available and goes dormant in dry summers and cold winters.
<b>Prairie sandreed</b> <i>Calamovilfa longifolia</i>	4	2	8	1,2,3,6	W	Adapted for dune stabilization. Coarse, woody. Slow seedling establishment. Greens up in late spring and stays green until frost.
<b>Bluejoint reedgrass</b> <i>Calamagrostis canadensis</i>	4	3	7	1,2,3,6	C	Silver-green showy seedheads persist into early autumn as a golden brown. Resembles reedtop. Forms large patches in temperate bogs. Cold tolerant to Arctic Circle.
<b>Needle and thread</b> <i>Stipa comata</i>	4	3	7	1,3,4,6	C	Range grass species with curious tan seedheads have long, tangled, sharp spikes that can scratch. Huge awns (seed whiskers) up to 4 inches.
<b>Reed canarygrass</b> <i>Phalaris arundinacea</i> L.	4	2	5	1,2,3,4,6	C	Tough, vigorous, pond-edge grass, tolerant of periodically wet soil. Vegetative cultivars Picta and Feesey are variegated.
<b>Yellow bluestem</b> <i>Bothriochloa ischaemum</i>	4	2	7	3,4,5	W	Yellow bluestem derives its names from its blue foliage and yellow heads. Vigorous prairiegrass. Two botanical varieties exist: ischaemum and songarica, of which King Ranch belongs to the latter.
<b>Little bluestem</b> <i>Schizachyrium scoparium</i>	4	2	8	1,3,4,5	W	Classic range grass of the shortgrass prairie. Blue-green foliage, turning red/orange/purple in autumn to red by winter. Retains leaves and color through winter. Tufted, leafy, greenish white stems. Fluffy, zigzag seedheads ripen in late fall to buff color.
<b>Caucasian bluestem</b> <i>Bothriochloa caucasica</i>	4	2	7	1,3,4	W	Strongly pink to purplish seedheads. Useful in prairie mixtures. Good heat and drought tolerance. Seed quality is a problem. Seedlots typically have less than 30% pure live seed.
<b>Foul bluegrass</b> <i>Poa palustris</i> L.	4	2	6	1,2	C	Heads are yellowish-green to purple, turning golden brown at maturity. Short-lived perennial bluegrass, similar to <i>P. trivialis</i> . Valuable for wetlands.

**FIGURE 3** CONTINUED**Ornamental grasses that can be grown from seed**

See footnote for seed cost and zone information.

Grass	Height (feet)	Seed cost*	Bloom month	Zone*	Cool-/Warm-season grass	Remarks
<b>Medium grasses</b>						
<b>Virginia wildrye</b> <i>Elymus virginicus</i> L.	3	3	7	1,2,3, 4,6	C	Attractive ornamental grass useful in far roughs of golf courses in most areas of the world. Colorful winter foliage, dark green summer foliage. Erect stems and limp leaves turn an interesting brown. Plants are extremely variable in form, from light to dark green, from fine to coarse and stemmy.
<b>Blue wildrye</b> <i>Elymus glaucus</i>	3	3	6	1,2,3, 6	C	Aggressive, invasive, short-lived perennial. Attractive blue color. Plants go dormant in the summer in dry climates. Hardy to 5,000 feet elevation.
<b>Altai wildrye</b> <i>Leymus angustus</i>	3	2	7	1,2,6	C	Leaves stay erect, protruding through snow in winter with fairly attractive seed spikes. Seedlings are slow to establish. Low seed yields make for an irregular supply.
<b>Timothy</b> <i>Phleum pratense</i> L.	3	1	7	1,2,3, 6	C	Vigorous foragegrass with interesting purplish green, bottlebrush seedheads. Produces fewer, smaller heads in hot climates.
<b>Redtop</b> <i>Agrostis gigantea</i>	3	2	7	1,2,3, 6	C	Flowers are a brilliant red-purple, turning slowly to a white-tan. Fast germination, tolerates heavy metals, low pH, shade, poor soils and clay.
<b>Purple needlegrass</b> <i>Stipa pulchra</i>	3	3	6	3,4,5	C	Immense, drooping whiskers on panicles. Effective for ground cover or erosion control. Vegetative propagation is difficult and seed is expensive. Drought tolerant, coastal, Mediterranean grass.
<b>Natal grass</b> <i>Rhynchelytrum repens</i>	3	3	7	4,5	W	Valuable ornamental grass with showy, attractive pink, fluffy seedheads with reddish, long, silky hairs. Short-lived perennial. Naturally invasive in mild climates and may escape cultivation.
<b>Fowl manna grass</b> <i>Glyceria striata</i> (Lam.)	3	3	6	1,2,3, 4,6	C	Interesting purplish seed spikes. Has smaller flower clusters than other Glycerias. Tolerates standing water. Useful in streambank erosion control.
<b>Weeping lovegrass</b> <i>Eragrostis curvula</i>	3	2	7	3,4,5	W	Weeping lovegrass has become the gold standard of cascading grasses on slopes, and if anything, has been overused for that purpose. Medium-green, fine-bladed foliage, turning light to dark green by autumn. Retains slender seedless stalks into early winter.
<b>Short grasses</b>						
<b>Sand lovegrass</b> <i>Eragrostis trichodes</i>	3	2	6	3,4	W	Wispy pink seedheads. Drought hardy and persistent, it is pH tolerant down to 4. Will tolerate moist, sandy soils.
<b>Boer lovegrass</b> <i>Eragrostis curvula</i> var. <i>conferta</i> Stapf	3	2	5	4,5	W	More drought tolerant than weeping lovegrass but lacks cold tolerance. Develops chlorosis on alkaline soils.
<b>Kangaroo grass</b> <i>Themeda triandra</i>	3	3	5	3,4,5	W	Light green bunchgrass with reddish-brown tinge on older leaves. Responds well to fertilizer, but may be outcompeted by weeds. Some seed available from Australia.
<b>Western fescue</b> <i>Festuca occidentalis</i>	3	3	6	1,2,3, 6	C	Short, tufted, dryland grass. Drooping panicles have long, slender, showy whiskers. Looks similar to hard fescue. Best at low to mid-elevations.
<b>Prairie dropseed</b> <i>Sporobolus heterolepis</i> (A. Gray)	3	4	9	1,2,3, 6	W	Tufted, erect, slender rangegrass with gold fall color turning creamy brown by winter. Fairly slow growing. Fine-textured, arching leaves. Useful on arid prairie sites.
<b>Deer tongue grass</b> <i>Dichanthelium clandestinum</i> (L.)	3	3	7	1,2,3, 4	W	Curious-looking, broad-bladed, soil-stabilizing grass. Seedhead is a small, panicle that rapidly fades. Unique, ornamental, spade-shaped blades borne on brownish purple, extremely hairy stems. Suffers in hot, dry climates.
<b>Plains bristlegrass</b> <i>Setaria macrostachya</i>	3	2	5	3,4,5	W	Adapted to drier sites and higher elevation. Seed is valuable for attracting birds and other wildlife to naturalized areas. Greens up in mid to late spring.
<b>Blowout grass</b> <i>Redfieldia flexuosa</i>	3	3	7	1,3	C	Flowers well into autumn. Stems erect, coarse, tough, hairless. Large open panicle bloom. Sand-stabilizing grass; grows in colonies primarily in the short-grass prairie region.
<b>Silver beardgrass</b> <i>Bothriochloa saccharoides</i>	3	3	7	3,4,5	W	Attractive, white puffy seedheads. Smooth, blue-green foliage. A dual turf and ornamental grass. Can escape cultivation and become a weed, particularly in bermudagrass turf. Begins growing in spring when temperature reaches 75 degrees F. Flowers emerge three to four weeks later.
<b>Western wheatgrass</b> <i>Pascopyrum smithii</i> (Rydb.)	2	2	7	1,2,3, 6	C	Sluggish germination from seed dormancy problems, requiring 2 to 3 years to form a full stand. Green in winter. Wildlife graze on seedheads.
<b>Streambank wheatgrass</b> <i>Elymus lanceolatus</i> Gould ssp. <i>lanceolatus</i>	2	2	6	1,2,3, 6	C	A drought-tolerant, low-growing, range species that looks similar to Western wheatgrass but is more drought resistant. Unclipped seedheads attract songbirds. Diseases and frequent mowing may thin stands.
<b>Slender wheatgrass</b> <i>Elymus trachycaulus</i> (Link)	2	1	6	1,2,3, 6	C	Short-lived perennial. Performs best the first three to four years. Purplish spiky seedheads. Better suited to moister climates than dry prairies.
<b>Crested wheatgrass</b> <i>Agropyron cristatum</i> (L.)	2	1	6	1,6	C	Early spring growth. Rapid, vigorous establishment, ample seed yield and favorable turf characteristics. The species has been shown to dominate low-maintenance stands and biologically suppress noxious weeds.

**Ornamental grasses that can be grown from seed**

See footnote for seed cost and zone information.

Grass	Height (feet)	Seed cost*	Bloom month	Zone*	Cool-Warm-season grass	Remarks
<b>Short grasses</b>						
<b>Beardless wheatgrass</b> <i>Pseudoroegneria spicata</i> (Pursh)	2	2	7	1,2,4	C	Similar in appearance to slender wheatgrass but more leafy. Tolerant of salinity, alkalinity and drought down to 13 inches of annual rainfall. Doesn't tolerate wet soils.
<b>Big squirreltail</b> <i>Sitanion jubatum</i>	2	3	6	1,2,3,4	C	Taller than bottlebrush squirreltail. Best at lower elevations.
<b>Squirrel's tail grass</b> <i>Hordeum jubatum</i> L.	2	3	6	1,2,3,4,6	C	An interesting ornamental grass with long awned, barley-like seedheads. Short-lived perennial. Can become invasive. Considered a noxious weed by some farmers, as the bristles can pierce animals' tongues. Green to purple flowers. Huge flower spikes are easily damaged by wind and rain.
<b>Red grass</b> <i>Bothriochloa macra</i>	2	3	7	3,4,5	W	Ornamental red-purple color to heads and stems. Tolerates zero fertilizer but responds if given more. Seed is produced in Australia.
<b>New Mexico needlegrass</b> <i>Stipa neomexicana</i>	2	3	6	4,5	C	Attractive, wispy seedheads with long awns. Very drought tolerant desert grass.
<b>Desert needlegrass</b> <i>Stipa speciosa</i>	2	3	5	3,4,5	C	Attractive, hardy desert grass. Survives in arid, mountainous regions. Long-lived.
<b>Columbia needlegrass</b> <i>Stipa nelsonii</i>	2	3	6	1,2,3,4,6	C	Primarily an alpine species with broad low-land adaptation. Attractive seedheads with prominent awns up to 2 inches long. Poor seed germination, but once germinated has good vigor.
<b>Plains lovegrass</b> <i>Eragrostis intermedia</i>	2	3	5	4	W	Shorter-growing ornamental for dry, low humidity sites. Tall gray to bronze-tipped spikes, turning reddish in alkaline soils.
<b>Prairie june grass</b> <i>Koeleria cristata</i> (L.).	2	3	5	1,2,3,4,6	C	Widely adapted. Thrives in dry or sandy soils. Early spring green-up. Difficult to establish.
<b>Tufted hairgrass</b> <i>Deschampsia caespitosa</i>	2	3	6	1,2,3,4,6	C	Attractive ornamental grass with a purplish seedhead. Prefers moist soils. Performs poorly in hot climates. Seedheads remain in place well into winter.
<b>Sideoats grama</b> <i>Bouteloua curtipendula</i>	2	2	8	1,3,4	W	Less drought-hardy than blue grama but with showier seedheads. Early greenup for a warm-season grass.
<b>Blue grama</b> <i>Bouteloua gracilis</i>	2	2	8	1,3,4,5	W	Produces a stemmy, blue turf. Dormant during dry summers. Long stand life.
<b>Meadow foxtail</b> <i>Alopecurus pratensis</i> L.	2	2	7	1,2,3,6	C	Valuable on wet soils, low pH. Bottlebrush seedheads. Ornamental vegetative cultivars are available.
<b>Idaho fescue</b> <i>Festuca idahoensis</i>	2	2	5	1,2,6	C	Very fine textured and useful in mixtures with turf fescues. Slow to establish — may take years to fill.
<b>California fescue</b> <i>Festuca californica</i>	2	2	5	4,5	C	Shade tolerant ornamental. Bluish foliage turns purplish to brown after frost. Thrives in dry soil.
<b>Arizona cottontop</b> <i>Digitaria californica</i>	2	3	7	5	W	Drought-hardy ornamental grass. Plants are erect, fuzzy and often purplish. Seed set is good. Light, fluffy seed is favored by wildlife.
<b>Meadow barley</b> <i>Hordeum brachyantherum</i>	2	3	6	1,2,3,4,6	C	Fast growing, short-lived perennial. Wide adaptation.
<b>Wallaby grass</b> <i>Danthonia semiannularis</i>	1	3	7	3,4,5	C	Pale straw-brown bristly seedheads and stems. Fine leaves with light gray color. Classic low maintenance grass of Australia.
<b>Bottlebrush squirreltail</b> <i>Elymus elymoides</i>	1	3	6	1,2,3,6	C	May flower twice a year if moisture is favorable. Seed spikes resemble bottlebrushes, as its name implies. Tolerant of drought and shallow soil. Short-growing, short-lived plants. Greens up early in spring.
<b>Crested hair grass</b> <i>Koeleria macrantha</i>	1	3	5	1,2,3	C	Widely distributed in nature but best suited to Zone 2. Adapted from roadsides to golf fairways.
<b>Sheep fescue</b> <i>Festuca ovina</i> L.	1	2	5	1,2,3,4	C	The seeded version of the Elija Blue ornamental cultivar. Tolerant of poor, sandy soils.
<b>Red brome</b> <i>Bromus rubens</i> L.	1	2	4	1,2,3,4	C	Seedheads have interesting, long whiskers up to 1 inch long with a reddish-purple cast.
<b>Upland bluegrass</b> <i>Poa glauca</i> Vahl ssp. <i>glauca</i>	1	3	7	1,6	C	Tufted, wiry grass with dark blue-green blades, sometimes with a strong whitish cast. May exhibit summer dormancy in drier climates.
<b>Idaho bentgrass</b> <i>Agrostis idahoensis</i> Nash.	1	2	7	1,2,3,4,6	C	U.S. native bentgrass found in nature along the Rocky Mountains from New Mexico to Fairbanks, Alaska. Vivid purple seedheads in August. Slender and low-growing. GolfStar variety tolerates mowing.

\* Seed cost: 1=under \$1, 2=\$1 to \$5, 3=\$5 to \$20, 4=More than \$20 (per pound). Note that seed price and availability of these grasses fluctuate widely from year to year, especially in high fire years such as this.

\* Adaptation zones:

**Zone 1** = Southern Canada and the states not mentioned below.

**Zone 2** = West coast of Washington and Oregon, and the east coast of New England.

**Zone 3** = Virginia, West Virginia, Kentucky, Missouri, Kansas, the southern parts of New Jersey, Illinois and Utah.

**Zone 4** = The Carolinas, Tennessee, Arkansas and the northern halves of Texas and New Mexico.

**Zone 5** = Florida, Southern California, Arizona and along the Gulf Coast.

**Zone 6** = Central and Northern Canada and the U.S. Rocky Mountains.

## Aftercare

Maintaining that "clumpy appearance" over the long haul is one of the challenges of ornamental grasses. Most turf managers, when they see something going awry, want to apply something to make it better. With ornamental grasses, that's the wrong thing to do.

Ornamental grass areas are at their best when they are fertilized lightly and infrequently (only once yearly, generally in the spring) and watered infrequently or not at all. The easiest way to fail with ornamental grass is to manage it like regular turf, with pop-up sprinklers and monthly fertilizer. The resulting plants will lose their clumps and develop into a hayfield. Infertile soil and minimal fertilizer encourages clumping while discouraging weed competitiveness.

Last, but not least, ornamental grasses require a yearly rejuvenation treatment. Ideally, grasses prefer to be burned. Burning eliminates straw, duff and weeds, but burning can be hazardous in residential areas.

In lieu of burning, you can mow ornamental grasses right before or as the new season's growth begins to appear. Cutting grasses back in late winter allows you to enjoy the winter foliage. Grasses can also be mowed or burned in late fall if winter appearance is unimportant. Be sure to remove clippings to prevent them from smothering the plants. A pass with a powerful leaf vacuum is recommended.

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In mild climates, warm-season grasses such as kangaroo grass can be sheared in September to force new growth for the fall. This sacrifices the flowers, but the fall foliage that recovers is particularly showy. Warm-season grasses should be mowed to within inches of the ground. Cool-season ornamental grasses are best mowed to half their mature size, no lower than about 6 inches.

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