

Low-Fuss, low-maintenance, tough and tolerant. What's not to like?

There are a plethora of advantages to adding ornamental grasses to your garden, not least of which is they offer visual appeal from summer through to winter. Due to the inherent nature of native plants in general—their evolutionary adaptations specifically for our area, their efficacy in solving common problems like erosion control, etc.—native grasses are also a no-brainer. Here's what you need to know:

Avoid exotic, invasive grasses.

Pampas, admired for its tall stature and dense seed plumes, can be wind-carried far beyond where it was planted. A single plant can produce millions of self-sowing seeds and invade our forests.

Miscanthus, native to Asia and considered problematic by the NC Extension, due to its ease of spreading and difficulty to eradicate.

Our favorite native grasses.

Pink Muhly Grass

(Muhlenbergia capillaris)

A US native, this grass puts on a spectacular display of pinkish-red, large airy open panicles from early to late Fall. Reminiscent of cotton candy, these beauties reach up to 3ft tall and wide, love to be in full sun (tolerating light shade) in dry to medium moisture soil.



Big Bluestem

(Andropogon gerardii)

A tall, perennial meadow grass that lends itself beautifully to the home landscape. The foliage changes color from green to blue-green in Summer to a deep red-bronze in fall. It reaches 5-8ft tall and forms in 2ft clumps. Deep roots make it incredibly drought tolerant, once established. Needs full sun. Great for erosion control.



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Little Bluestem

(Schizachyrium scoparium)

A shorter option that may be preferred in structured garden landscapes. Reaching 2-4ft tall, its clumps can reach up to 2ft wide, once mature. In fall the blue-green stems turn a golden to reddish brown with fluffy white seed heads. Dried stems and seed heads are delightful in cut flower arrangements.



Switchgrass

(Panicum Virgatum)

Native to NC, is a perennial tallgrass reaching 3-4ft and with plumes up to 7ft tall. It forms dense clumps and can spread by creeping rhizomes. It thrives in full sun but can tolerate part shade. Its finely textured branched flowers hover over the foliage like clouds. There are many cultivars available.



River Oats, aka Sea Oats

(Chasmanthium lafolium)

A native, clump-forming grass that reaches anywhere from 2-5ft tall in clumps of 1-2ft width. Loved for its flat, nodding seed heads that rustle in the wind & turn golden yellow in autumn. Easy to grow in moist to wet (well draining) soils. Plant in part sun to part shade (quite tolerant of shade!).



Appalachian Sedge

(Carex appalachica)

A member of the Sedge family—they are “grass-like” perennial plants. Frequently used as a native plant lawn alternative and are ideal in dry, shady areas. The blades are 12-18” long and don’t stand up straight, thus creating a textured, weeping shape that forms in dense tufts with mound height of 6-8”. There are many varieties of sedge, most of which love shade.



Prairie Dropseed

(Sporobolus heterolepis)

Adds a touch of elegance to your landscape. Bursts of flowering panicles in tints pinks and browns float above the tufted base in late summer. In fall the foliage turns gold. Reaches 2-4ft tall and thrives in full sun with dry-medium moisture soil. Deer resistant and host to 6 species of butterflies/moths. This is an NC endangered species.



Not only do native grasses improve your overall soil health, they are often the perfect solution for those hard-to-plant areas.

What's wrong with a lawn? They create a sterile wasteland for our native friends, the pollinators. They are cut short so they don't bloom (so no seeds for the birds in fall) and they don't provide food for caterpillars and thus parent birds needing to feed their young have to fly a lot further from their nest to find caterpillars to feed their babies!