

GARDENS Four Seasons

GARDENDESIGN
MAR/APR. 2018

The Allure of GRASSES

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*"Though I do not believe that a plant will spring up where no seed has been, I have great faith in a seed. Convince me that you have a seed there, & I am prepared to expect wonders."*

- Henry David Thoreau



(We KNOW those wonders will come Henry David but just have to wait a....little.....bit.....[don't know if I can!!].....  
....longer!

## GRASSES - PERENNIAL

Ahhh-h-h-h Grasses - moving gently in the warm breeze - not much compares with the serenity & muted rustling sound in this picture!

Using Grasses in Landscape Design is a relatively new concept on the Prairies. People used to look at it & think - ewww! Quack Grass! or that it reminded them too much of a wheat field.



*- Karl Foerster Grass establishing along the River Bank*

Slowly we've developed a different perspective on their use. Thru' our travels & now having more selections to choose from, we've found their silhouette & texture can be a strong feature in any bed & sometimes even add Winter interest. The spiky fronds are a marvelous contrast to other types of foliage. While they are not for everyone - their appeal of being drought tolerant after establishing has increased their popularity on the prairies.

Let's look at 3 different types of hardy perennial grasses & finish off with a number of perennials that simulate the look of grass.

1. **Karl Foerster Grass** (*Calamagrostis*) is a clump forming



plant that reaches an average height of 4'. It starts producing showy seed heads about the end of June - start of July & increases in showiness right up until Autumn. As they begin to die back, they dry turning a soft 'wheat' colour & remain rigid, acting as an important bit of scenery throughout our coldest months. In fact, you see them more & more in front yards & commercial plantings all over the city. They look magical planted as single specimen, even more charming used as a row & superb as a backdrop for any perennial or low shrub border. Super easy to grow in full sun or part shade, they do well even beneath mature Spruce & Pine Trees!

Clipping them back to the ground each Spring is the only real maintenance required. They tend to spread slowly thru' rhizomes (roots) beneath the ground so it is wise to plant them in a spot where a bit of spreading won't be an issue.

Their greatest attribute, I believe, is the movement they offer in even the slightest breeze - adding a magnificent, mystical element to any vista!

2. **Blue Sheep's Fescue** (Festuca) also grows in clumps but only reaches about a 1' height & instead of spreading via roots - they reproduce with the many seeds they form. They love full, *blasting* sunlight & will struggle in anything resembling shade. They're extremely tolerant to drought once they are established - usually after the first year. Their only real issues are: seeds will sprout readily in any bare soil & the thick clumps themselves are time consuming to hack thru' when removing last year's growth.





*The blue/green hue varies from one variety to another & are a great contrast against yellow or purple foliage & flowers & even just plain boulders.*



3. **Ribbon Grass** (Phalaris) is the third reliably hardy grass for our region. It's available in white/green or yellow/green striped variegation. It tops out at about 1 1/2' - 2' in height. Ribbon Grass also will grow beneath mature Conifers in semi-shade or full sun. *Note:* It is very aggressive (aka invasive) & will take over any space where it can send up shoots via rhizomes. Simply use this feature where they will serve you best. Locations such as raised beds or spaces that are



surrounded by hard surfaces or walls will keep their spreading in check. They flop to the ground like wilted lettuce when the frost hits so don't offer any Winter appeal. They do however look spectacular thru' out the growing seasons in semi-shady spots where the variegation virtually jumps out at you - brightening the darkness.

If these perennial grasses don't quite take your fancy - why not try other perennials that resemble grasses but have the added bonus of flowers?

*Armeria maritima*  
- SEA PINKS



Ferns - NORTHERN or  
OSTRICH FERNS





Hemerocallis - DAYLILY



Iris -BEARDED IRIS



Iris siberica - SIBERIAN IRIS





Liatris  
- BLAZING STAR



Penstemon -BEARDTONGUE



Perovskia  
- RUSSIAN SAGE



*Physostegia* - OBEDIENT PLANT



*Salvia sylvestris*- SALVIA



*Veronica spicata*  
- SPEEDWELL





Any of the above plants will give you the desired upright, spiky look of grasses & most also offer movement in a light wind or whisper of a breeze!

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## UPCOMING EVENTS

I know we all anxiously await the opening of all the local Greenhouses.

So I wanted to let you know that just a short drive out of S'toon towards Clavet - **MOTHER EARTH GREENHOUSES** (one of my favourite places to visit!) opens April 22, 2018 just in time to celebrate **EARTH DAY** - what a coincidence! ;)

<http://motherearthgreenhouses.com>



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## PLANT OF THE MONTH

### EVANS CHERRY TREE (*Prunus* 'Evans')

Developed right here at our own University of Sask., the Evans Cherry Tree is the only true 'tree' sized *tart* cherry variety. I have a beautiful specimen in my own back yard that began producing heavily after only 3 years. (in fact I bought it from MOTHER EARTH GREENHOUSE!) Mature height is about 12'-15' & they prefer full sun but tolerate some shade. The bonus is the bright cherry red fruit in mid-Summer!



- *why not cut some branches of a Cherry, Apple or Forsythia, put them in a water filled vase & enjoy Spring a bit earlier when they start to leaf out & flower indoors!*





*- the striking  
bark & canopy  
of the tree are  
reasons in  
themselves to  
use Evans  
Cherry!*



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## DESIGN BRILLIANCE

World famous Dutch Landscape Designer Piet Oudolf, began the use of massive ‘waves’ of grasses & perennials together to create his brilliant, dreamy planting schemes. He is credited for making the use of grasses in landscapes so popular, starting way back in the 1980s.

Thanks for doing that for all of us Piet!





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& lastly I just have to brag a bit - I came in as a Semi-Finalist at the SABEX awards recently.  
(Saskatoon Achievement in Business Excellence)

I was flattered as all get out to qualify as a Customer Service Finalist & pumped to enjoy their Awards evening. Thanks to everyone who has used my services & continues to support my passion!



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## **May/June GARDENDESIGN looks at GRASSES - the ANNUAL kind!**

Not a fan of Perennial Grasses? Well, do I have some amazing ANNUAL GRASS selections for you - just in time for Spring planting!

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## **BACK ISSUES**

I've done a blurb on STYLES of GARDENS that you might find interesting as you wait for Spring to arrive - simply request it & I will zip it on over to you!





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Feel free to forward this to any friends!  
*(or they can email me to request their own copy!)*

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**DID YOU KNOW? - I never, Ever, EVER share my email list - NEVER! :)**

\* to UNSUBSCRIBE from GARDENDESIGN please reply to this email with NO THANKS!

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