

Will of the Wisp

Dramatic Grasses work all season magic!

By David Dunn of **Rideau Woodland Ramble**

Grass you don't cut

There is one perennial that is coming on strong these days, so strong that I think it will soon overtake the Hosta as favorite plant of most gardeners. I am talking about grass. Not the grass you put all the tender loving care into to create that green carpet of lawn; the clumping kind, the one you see taking a role of growing importance in the perennial border. Grasses are extremely tolerant of the hot dry conditions we increasingly see our summers yield, and are therefore a very smart choice. This characteristic is one way to reduce your use of water in the garden, and one way to prepare for the coming climate changes your garden will have to endure. There is only one big caution. Grasses can be "*runners*" or "*clumpers*". Make sure you are certain you know which type you are looking for, and ensure you are putting the right type in the right location. The vast majority of gardeners avoid the runners with extreme caution!

Range of Colour

Grasses are available in quite arrange of colour. You can find a series of greens, powder blues (Blue Oat Grass), gold's (Japanese fountain Grass-All Gold), variegated (almost white) Japanese Variegated Grass and reds, as in Blood Grass. Combinations of colour can be very interesting, either with different plants together, or just one plant on its own with multiple colours, such as with Zebra Grass(gold and green with horizontal strips!). You can imagine being an artist with this range of colours choice at the tip of your brush.

Size and Shape

Grasses are available in a full range of sizes, from 18 centimeters to over 2 meters. This variety, along with colour and shape choices allows you to create both foregrounds, mid range and background effects in the garden, truly a versatile plant. Add to that growth habits that can be slightly rounded, fountain like or very vertical, as in Karl Forrester, and you have all the characteristics any artist would need to create a great canvas.



Putting it all together!

When you put all of these performance characteristics in your garden, you win an all season prize. In the early part of the year, you have the thriving green wisps of growth that are great contrast in texture to all other plants. As the summer progresses the clumps take on a stately and dramatic role as visual specimens and great companions to the other flowering perennials. In the fall, the grasses flower, with all the drama of a brilliant fire works display, or a great fountain! In winter, the grass is gold, and stands above the snow to provide winter interest, colour and movement. How can you beat that! Well.... there is one added surprise. There are grasses that thrive in shade, in addition to the ones that need full sun.



So, take a look at grasses, to create texture in a mixed bed, or as a complete composition of grasses alone. You will be amazed, and glad you did!

Dave Dunn
Rideau Woodland Ramble

We will *capture* your imagination!

Rideau Woodland Ramble (613-258-3797) is open from April to November 7 days a week from 9am-5pm,
and carries a range of grasses for sale that can be seen in their display gardens
www.rideauwoodlandramble.com

All Photos by Dave Dunn 2007