

2006 Perennial Plant of the Year

The Perennial Plant Association has selected 'Firewitch Cheddar Pink', *Dianthus gratianopolitanus*, as the 2006 Perennial Plant of the Year. This cheddar pink has brilliant, hot pink flowers with notched petals. The common name pink isn't derived from the color of the flowers. Instead, it refers to the notched petal edges, which appear to have been cut with pinking shears.

'Firewitch Cheddar Pink' blooms for several weeks in the spring. It occasionally blooms again in summer and early fall during periods of moderate temperatures. The flowers have a spicy, clove-like fragrance. The foliage is blue-green, needle-like and often lasts well into winter. The foliage only reaches 3 to 4 inches tall while the flowers extend to 6 to 8 inches tall. This lovely low-growing perennial works well along border edges or slopes. It is also ideally suited for walls and terraces. It is an excellent plant in rock gardens, formal beds, borders and cottage gardens.

Cheddar Pinks thrive in sunny locations and well-drained soils. Most pinks prefer neutral to slightly alkaline soils. Plants do not perform well in poorly drained, wet soils and extremely hot sites. 'Firewitch Cheddar Pink' is hardy to USDA Hardiness Zone 3 and should perform well in all of the Midwest.

Source: Perennial Plant Association <http://www.perennialplant.org>



"Firewitch Cheddar Pink"

Cannas in the Garden

Mary Jane Frogge
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Cannas are quick growing, vigorous ornamental plants with heavy foliage and large flowers. Flower colors range from dark red to light green. Leaf colors can be reddish-purple, bronze or green. They are used most effectively for bedding plants in public parks and larger home grounds where they can be planted in front of taller shrubbery and viewed from a distance. Their vigor and size make them less desirable for planting in restricted areas.

Cannas require a warm, sunny location and under such conditions are capable of giving a subtropical effect, if used in quantity with ricinus or castor bean, caladium or elephant's ear or other appropriate plants. They thrive best under conditions suitable for corn, that is, a warm, well drained soil, well enriched with decayed manure.

The tubers should be



Cannas

planted after all danger of frost is past. A portion of an old tuber containing several strong buds is best. The old tubers may be divided to single eyes, but the weak eyes are likely to make weak plants. If very strong clumps are wanted, a whole tuber may be used. When separated to single eyes they are best started in 4-inch pots covered with glass. The tubers should be planted

5- inches deep. Cannas should be planted 12 to 18 inches apart depending on the size of the varieties used and the effect desired. In dry weather a thorough soaking of the plants once a week will insure a stronger growth.

The blooms should be picked as soon as withered. After the tops have been killed by frost they should dry a few days, then be cut off. The tubers need to be dug, dried in the sun (a few hours) and stored in a cool (40-50 degrees F) moderately dry (30% humidity) cellar or storage area. The tubers can be stored in dry sphagnum moss, vermiculite or sand. They may also be placed on wire racks so air can circulate freely. No frost must reach the tubers and they must not be too warm or dry. A cellar suitable for potatoes is about right for cannas.

Source: Donald Steinegger and Donald Janssen.

Ornamental Grasses for the Landscape

Bob Henrickson

Nebraska Statewide Arboretum

Ornamental grasses are key plants in the natural landscape — providing seasonal beauty with colors and textures only they can provide. Many gardeners are discovering the many benefits ornamental grasses bring to the garden while creating a more diverse and adaptable landscape for the Great Plains.

There is an ornamental grass for any garden situation. They are very easy to grow when provided a well-drained soil and sunny conditions. Ornamental grasses are generally free of garden pests and require little, if any, irrigation once they're established. Perhaps no other group of plants can offer such a huge array of textures, forms, sizes and colors as grasses. Make plans to include a few of the following ornamental grass selections in your garden and transform your landscape into a array of long linear leaves and fine stems.

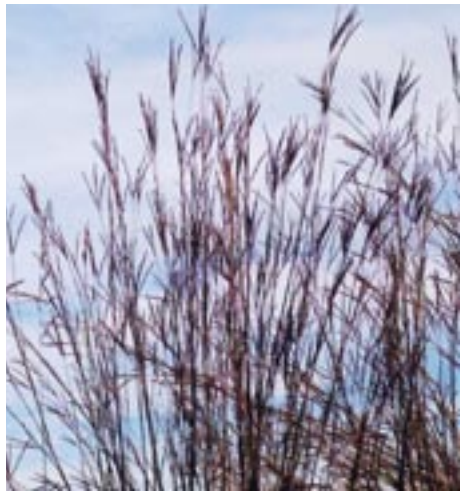
Native Grasses of the Great Plains

Junegrass, Prairie (*Koeleria pyramidata*) native, cool season bunch grass with gray-green leaves; blooms early June with narrow, erect seed heads; needs well-drained, dry soils; can be short-lived in heavy soils; will reseed making it ideal for naturalizing; 18 inches high.

Gramma, Blue (*Bouteloua gracilis*) native to dry prairies; tufted with thin, wiry leaves to 8 inches; 1 inch eyelash-like seed heads top thin stems to 18 inches in late June; nice decorator plant or mass for prairie style lawn.

Gramma, Sideoats (*Bouteloua curtipendula*) mounds of gray-green foliage; numerous narrow flower stalks with oat-like seed heads held on one side of the stems, to 3 feet high; bronze-orange fall color; straw in winter.

Bluestem, Big (*Andropogon gerardii*) impressive native of the tall grass prairie; rich, green leaves to 2 feet by the



Big Bluestem

end of June; flowering stalks in August up to 6 feet high; seed heads resemble turkey's foot; reliable fall color in copper, rich orange, with maroon tones; may grow floppy if shaded; wet or dry soils.

Indiangrass (*Sorghastrum nutans*) clump former with blue-green leaves and golden, feathery seed heads held above leaves in the fall to 6 feet high; seed heads move with the slightest breeze; provide moisture retentive soils for best results; they will reseed.

Lovegrass, Sand (*Eragrostis tricooides*) native to sandy soils with leafy upright flowering stems to 4 feet high; masses of airy, fine textured seed heads in August; self sows manageably in loam and readily in sand but easily managed; early spring green appreciated; will be floppy in shady conditions or excess water.

Dropseed, Prairie (*Sporobolus heterolepis*) native bunch grass with thin, ribbon-like leaves form 2 foot mounds; delicate seed heads appear in late summer and remain attractive through fall; attractive when back lit; scented; foliage turns deep orange to light copper; likes it dry and never needs dividing.

Bluestem, Little (*Schizachrium scoparium*) dependable native bunch grass with fine-textured bright green or light blue leaves to 2 feet tall in summer; the late summer flowers dry in the fall,



Prairie Dropseed

becoming silvery and remain attractive through winter; avoid highly fertile soils, excessive moisture or heavy mulching.

Switchgrass (*Panicum virgatum*) many nice selections of this dependable native; 'Shenandoah' tight clump to 4 feet with red in the summer foliage; 'Dallas Blues' outstanding tall plumes in the fall; 'Heavy Metal' nice blue-gray foliage, leaves with nice orange-yellow fall color.

Hardy Exotic Grasses

Blue Fescue, Dwarf (*Festuca glauca*) Lovely bunch grass with powder blue foliage to 10 inches; 'Elijah Blue' is the most dependable; must have full sun and well-drained soils for longevity in the garden; native to Europe.

Carex or Sedge — many exciting yellow and white variegated forms selected from plants native to Japan and China; many different grass-like plants in a wide variety of color, form and size for wet or dry soils, sun or shade.

Hairgrass, Tufted (*Deschampsia caespitosa*) look like tufts of long, thin hair topped by masses of loose, airy seed heads in late spring; consistent moisture for best performance; full sun to part shade; 15 to 18 inches high and wide; native to Europe.

Miscanthus — showy grasses of many shapes and sizes, ranging from 3

to 12 feet tall; feathery plumes top plants in the fall with new cultivars providing colorful foliage and better flowers; cut back to the ground in spring; prefers full sun and will topple if planted in too much shade. 'Autumn Red' 3 to 4 feet; early bloomer with fall color; 'Malepartus' showy seed heads, early; 'Strictus' with yellow bands on the foliage.

Oatgrass, Blue (*Helictotrichon sempervirens*) a western Mediterranean native; clump-forming grass with intense blue leaves to 2 feet; delicate flower stalks appear in late spring; suffers in poorly drained soils.

Pennisetum, Chinese (*Pennisetum alopecuroides*) narrow-leaved bunch grass with foxtail-like silvery-white plumes in late summer; typically 2 to 3 feet high; stunning in groups or masses; native to China.

Ravennae Grass (*Saccharum ravennae*) native to the Mediterranean region; clumping grass forming 4 foot wide gray-green mounds of foliage by August; large plummy flower heads are produced in late-August on stalks up to 12 feet tall; excess moisture or fertility encourages lax growth; cut to the ground in spring.

Reed Grass, Feather (*Calamagrostis x acutiflora*) deep green, lustrous foliage with loosely feathered flowering stalks in early summer; they constrict to narrow buff-colored plumes by fall and remain attractive all winter; easy to grow in most soils, but best in well-drained fertile soils; native to Europe. 'Karl Foerster' is a popular selection for good reason; 'Overdam' foliage has cream-white stripes; 'Strica' earliest to bloom, very upright; very well behaved grass.

Reed Grass, Korean (*Calamagrostis brachytricha*) native to woodland edge in Asia; glossy green foliage and red tinted feathery flower heads in September create strong vertical plant; the showy flowers fade to silvery green through fall; prefers consistent moisture but is easy to grow in most soils; excellent in containers; 3 to 4 feet high.