



'Amazon Mist'

'Spiky Blue'

'Aureola'

'Eatons Canyon'

Expand Your Designer Grasses Palette

by JOLI A. HOHENSTEIN

HIGH fashion isn't just for the runway. Color sells and sizzles in these sure-to-please varieties. Emerald Coast Growers helped make ornamental grasses mainstream, and they're loving these new varieties that are anything but. We asked Cheri Markowitz, sales manager and grass guru, for her favorite picks for this season. Kick your grass program up a notch with the latest designer grasses.

Bold Burgundies

Send spring sales soaring with one of the world's hottest new grasses. *Pennisetum* 'Fireworks' is ready for liftoff. This international award winner is striped burgundy, pink, cream, white, green and

ruby red on plants up to 36 inches tall. A grand finale of rich red plumes tops off the spectacular foliage. It's hardy to Zones 9 and 10.

Fire up success with *pennisetum* 'Skyrocket.' Pink projectile plumes sparkle above bright green and pristine white variegated foliage. This fiery, easy-growing, low-maintenance cultivar is a new sport of the highly popular 'Fireworks.' It is tender and grows 20 to 30 inches in full sun to shade. 'Skyrocket' is hardy to Zones 9 to 11.

Pennisetum alopecuroides 'Burgundy Bunny' blazes with color from summer, when its petite leaves are mainly green with red accents, to fall, when the nearly all-red blades light up the landscape. Ivory cotton tail plumes top off the short stunner, which grows to only 18 inches. 'Burgundy Bunny' is great for containers

*Pennisetum villosum*

or borders in sun to part shade, and it's hardy to Zone 6.

Golden Greens

Gracefully arching green-striped gold leaves form a waterfall of color in

Hakonechloa macra 'Aureola.' Its slight upward cascade gives it added movement and texture for even more interest. With a beautiful clumping habit, 'Aureola' shines in beds and containers alike. Autumn brings beautiful pink and red tones to mix with the green and gold. Hardy to Zone 5, 'Aureola' grows up to 18 inches in sun to part shade.

Bouteloua gracilis 'Blonde Ambition' displays a mane of large, showy chartreuse seed heads, each over 2 inches long and held horizontally. Big and bold, this grama grass reaches heights of up to 36 inches and blooms from early summer through winter. Stems stand tough even through snow, giving interest and color for six to eight months. 'Blonde Ambition' prefers full sun and is hardy to Zone 4.

The Natural Look

Put on a real show with the massive fluffy white plumes on *Cortaderia selloana* 'Pumila.' Reaching about 6 feet tall, this dwarf pampas grass makes an impact with its arching mid-green leaves and thick stems. 'Pumila' makes an unmistakable specimen and gives the added benefits of drought tolerance. 'Pumila' loves full sun and is hardy to Zone 6.

Feathertop grass, *Pennisetum villosum*, lives up to its name with striking feathery, ivory white plumes above bright greenish-gray foliage. The unique flower forms appear in late summer to early fall and also have an extended life, adding great texture to cut and dried arrangements. Reaching up to 30 inches tall, plants prefer full sun and are hardy to Zone 8.

Powerful Purple

Pennisetum 'Prince' and 'Princess' offer what no other can: foliage that actually deepens in the summer heat, rather than fading out. Both feature much fuller habits and more vigorous growth than others, with the look of phormium but the qualities of *pennisetum*. Their upright, blade-like foliage doesn't flop. Blades on 'Princess' are slightly thinner and more petite than 'Prince.' Leaves come in green with purple margins and a purple midrib, revealing rich purple tones as they unfold. Both also provide winter interest, turning bold beige and holding their shape and habit.



'Princess Molly'



'Rubrum'

The second generation of 'Prince,' 'Princess Molly' bears thin, beautiful, deep burgundy leaves but only grows 14 to 20 inches tall. It is an ideal plant for smaller landscapes where color is desired but size is not. Plants have excellent disease resistance and weather tolerance and may be grown across the country. 'Princess Molly' loves full sun and won't flower except in totally frost-free areas.

'Princess Caroline' provides brilliant purple foliage on plants that reach a mature height of about 3 feet. It is a shorter version of 'Princess' but with better disease resistance, excellent weather tolerance and sturdier growth. Plants will not flower except in totally frost-free areas.

This family adds texture and interest to large mixed containers and landscape beds or planted in sweeps or masses. They love full sun and are hardy to Zone 8.

Meanwhile, the wildly popular *Pennisetum xadvena* 'Rubrum' offers the

winning combination of striking burgundy red foliage and foxtail-like plumes that catch the breeze and add interest to landscapes and containers alike. It's a sun-loving purple fountain grass that reaches up to 5 feet tall. Fast growing and prolific blooming, this tender perennial is everything an annual should be, and it's hardy to Zones 9 and 10.

Another hot annual grass, *P. xadvena* 'Eatons Canyon' is like a slightly shorter version of 'Rubrum,' topping out at less than 3 feet. Vibrant red-brown flower plumes rise above stunning narrow red-bronze foliage. With its finer, greener foliage and dwarf size, 'Eatons Canyon' is the star of the show in mixed containers or small gardens.

Rainbow Ready

The ColorGrass series features a ready-made rainbow of colorful species picked for its perfect pot performance. *Carex buchananii* 'Red Rooster' shoots upright red-bronze foliage with curls at the tips. *C. comans* 'Amazon Mist' cascades a waterfall of silver-green leaves with white undersides. *C. comans* 'Bronco' boasts arching skinny brown foliage. *C. flagellifera* 'Bronzita' shines with wider, more upright bronzy leaves. And *Corynephorus canescens* 'Spiky Blue' kicks it up with a blue-green punk rock shock of color.

Whatever the palette, there's a color to please. Grab your grasses and go to work! **GG**

About the author: Joli A. Hohenstein is marketing and PR specialist for Pen & Petal, Inc., a marketing, advertising and public relations agency for the green industry. She can be reached at joli@penandpetal.com.