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UC Marin Master Gardeners - Grasses



Botanical Name: *Acorus gramineus* 'Ogon'
Common Name: Ogon Japanese Sweet Flag
Plant Type: Ground cover, Perennial, Grass, Aquatic
Sun: Full, Half, Shade
Water: High, Extra in Summer

This perennial will grow about 6"-12" tall and slowly spreads through rhizomes. It acts like a grass and groundcover. Leaves are thin and variegated with yellow and green stripes. Flowers are considered insignificant. It can tolerate sun or shade but must be in moist soil. This plant can even tolerate being in ponds. It does best in afternoon shade in warm inland valleys.

Plant Height: Under 1', 1-3'
Flower Color: n/a
Attracts Wildlife: n/a
Leaf Color: Yellow Green, Yellow, Variegated
Flower Season: n/a



Botanical Name: *Calamagrostis X acu.* 'Karl Foerster'
Common Name: Karl Foerster Feather Reed Grass
Plant Type: Grass
Sun: Full, Half
Water: Medium, Extra in Summer

This ornamental perennial grass grows 4-6' tall x 1-1.5' wide and has semi-evergreen foliage that is green in spring and summer and turns green/brown in fall. The flowers look like feathery plumes; they bloom in mid June and emerge a light green but quickly turn to pink/purple. Flowers look great in a dried flower arrangement. This grass does well in full sun but will tolerate afternoon shade in warm, inland valleys. It needs regular watering and fertile soil. Great for erosion control and in wet areas.

Plant Height: 3-6'
Flower Color: Pink, Purple
Attracts Wildlife: n/a
Leaf Color: Green
Flower Season: Summer



Botanical Name: *Calamagrostis foliosa*
Common Name: Mendocino Reed Grass
Plant Type: Grass
Sun: Full
Water: Low

Cool-season bunchgrass native to northern California coastal scrub. Grows 1' tall and 2' wide, with arching blue-green foliage that often has purple highlights. Silver-purple flower heads appear mid-spring through early summer, turning a golden wheat tone in fall. Plant along the coast in full sun or light shade inland in well-drained soil. Tolerates drier conditions when grown in shade but looks best with occasional to regular irrigation. Tolerates wind and salt spray and is resistant to predation by herbivores. Does NOT respond well to being chopped back. Instead, divide existing clumps ...

Plant Height: 1-3'
Flower Color: White
Attracts Wildlife:
Leaf Color:
Flower Season: Spring, Summer



Botanical Name: *Calamagrostis nutkaensis*
Common Name: Pacific Reed Grass
Plant Type: Grass
Sun: Full, Half
Water: Low, Medium

A large handsome bunch grass from the coastal regions of Monterey County to Alaska that forms huge tussocks in open moist meadows and on coastal bluffs. It can also be found as an understory at the edges of coniferous forests. Wide green blades grow 2 - 3 ft. tall with flowering culms to 4 ft. Good background or accent plant for the woodland or meadow. Will take full sun in somewhat cooler areas. Best with some summer water and partial shade inland. Deer resistant. -Cal Flora Nursery

Plant Height: 1-3'
Flower Color: White
Attracts Wildlife: n/a
Leaf Color: Grey Green
Flower Season: Spring, Summer



Botanical Name: *Carex 'Frosty Curls'*
Common Name: Frosty Curls Sedge
Plant Type: Grass
Sun: Full, Half
Water: Medium, Extra in Summer

'Frosty Curls' is an attractive grass sedge, that stays less than 1' tall and 2' wide. It can be planted in full sun along the coast but needs afternoon shade in warm inland valleys. It needs regular watering and can be planted close to ponds or boggy areas. Rake the "hair" once in a while. This plant needs regular watering. Foliage is thin, silvery green, evergreen and shoots from a center point and recurves. Flowers are inconspicuous.

Plant Height: 1-3'
Flower Color: n/a
Attracts Wildlife: n/a
Leaf Color: Light Green, Silver
Flower Season: n/a



Botanical Name: *Carex elata 'Aurea'*
Common Name: Bowles' Golden Sedge
Plant Type: Grass, Aquatic
Sun: Full, Half
Water: Medium, Extra in Summer

This Sedge is a short ornamental grass the grows to about 3' tall and wide. It grows in full sun, needing regular watering. If planted in partial shade, this plant will need less watering; foliage will turn more lime green in shade. Foliage is evergreen, starting off in spring as bright yellow, turning green depending on amount of sun. May die back in winter but will come back in spring. This grass will grow in standing water thus making it useful for ponds and boggy areas. In some areas, this plant is used as an annual.

Plant Height: 1-3'
Flower Color: n/a
Attracts Wildlife: n/a
Leaf Color: Light Green, Yellow Green
Flower Season: n/a



Botanical Name: *Carex pansa*
Common Name: California Meadow Sedge
Plant Type: Grass
Sun: Full
Water: Medium, Extra in Summer

CA native *Carex* stays 6" or under and spreads up to 2' by rhizomes. Can be used as a naturalistic lawn substitute. Requires significant water to obtain good coverage, but once coverage is reached water can be reduced and maintenance is close to zero. Unmowed, the plant can be used effectively in a variety of conditions. Prefers sandy soil.

Plant Height: Under 1'
Flower Color: n/a
Attracts Wildlife:
Leaf Color:
Flower Season: n/a



Botanical Name: *Carex testacea*
Common Name: Orange or Brown Sedge
Plant Type: Perennial, Grass
Sun: Full
Water: Medium

The testacea variety is an evergreen perennial that reaches 2' tall bearing very narrow, coppery brown leaves splitting to hair-like threads at their tips, and continuing to grow to 4-8' in length. This plant should be grown in sun with little or no summer watering. During winter, foliage turns orange. If this grass is planted in shade, foliage stays green. Flowers are insignificant. Orange Sedge looks great in containers or spilling over near walkways or into water features.

Plant Height: 1-3'
Flower Color: n/a
Attracts Wildlife: n/a
Leaf Color: Bronze, Brown, Green, Orange
Flower Season: n/a



Botanical Name: *Chasmanthium latifolium*
Common Name: Northern Sea Oats
Plant Type: Perennial, Grass
Sun: Half
Water: High

This perennial grass can quickly reach 2'-3' high and 2' wide. Leaves resemble bamboo leaves, turning copper colored in fall and then brown in winter. During summer, flat, dangling, reddish flower spikes appear at the end of curved thin branches. Flowers are wonderful for arrangements. This grass does best in part sun with constantly moist soil. It does well near a pond or wet areas. It tolerates ocean spray.

Plant Height: 1-3'
Flower Color: Red
Attracts Wildlife: n/a
Leaf Color: Green
Flower Season: Summer



Botanical Name: *Deschampsia cespitosa*

Common Name: Tufted Hair Grass

Plant Type: Perennial, Grass

Sun: Full, Half, Shade

Water: Low

The tufted hairgrass is a warm season, clumping grass that grows 10" tall with summer flowers that reach to 2' tall. This grass tolerates partial shade and heavy clay soils. It is good in waterside plantings and for mountain area meadows. This grass is a California native and is a beneficial insect plant. Flowers are insignificant.

Plant Height: 3-6'

Flower Color: Yellow

Attracts Wildlife: Wildlife

Leaf Color: Green

Flower Season: Summer



Botanical Name: *Festuca 'Siskiyou Blue'*

Common Name: Siskiyou Blue Fescue

Plant Type: Grass

Sun: Full, Half

Water: Very Low, Low

Siskiyou Blue Fescue quickly reaches 1' tall and 2' wide, with a clumping habit. Foliage is needle-like, blue green and attractive. Flower stalks rise above foliage from spring through summer but are considered insignificant. This plant is grown for its foliage. This grass does best in full to part sun with well draining soil. It attracts butterflies and birds. Very reliable and hardy. Low water use.

Plant Height: 1-3'

Flower Color: n/a

Attracts Wildlife: Birds, Butterflies

Leaf Color: Blue Green

Flower Season: n/a



Botanical Name: *Festuca mairei*

Common Name: Atlas Fescue

Plant Type: Grass

Sun: Full, Half

Water: Low

A long-lived evergreen clumping grass that forms fountain-like mounds to 18 to 24 inches tall and wide with yellowish gray-green foliage. Plant in full sun or part shade in a well-drained soil with occasional to regular irrigation - this plant is fairly drought tolerant when established but looks better (with fewer brown tips with occasional water) when watered regularly. It is quite cold hardy as a dormant grass (USDA Zone 4) and stays evergreen in warmer climates. It is tolerant of diverse soil types and does not need to be cut back, but benefits from a spring raking to remove older foli ...

Plant Height: 1-3'

Flower Color: n/a

Attracts Wildlife:

Leaf Color:

Flower Season: Summer



Botanical Name: *Festuca rubra*

Common Name: Creeping Red Fescue, Red Fescue

Plant Type: Ground cover, Grass

Sun: Full, Half, Shade

Water: Medium, Extra in Summer

Creeping Red Fescue is not red but dark green. It is a great ground cover kept at longer lengths for banks. It is very shade tolerant and lush looking. This is a great substitute for lawns as it doesn't need to be mowed. It does best in cool summer areas but will tolerate shade in hot inland areas. Hair-like blades reach 1'-2' tall. It does best with sandy or loam soil that is well draining and acidic. This fescue attracts wildlife. Great for erosion control. It tolerates cold but not heat. It needs moderate amount of water and more during hot spells.

Plant Height: 1-3'

Flower Color: n/a

Attracts Wildlife: Wildlife

Leaf Color: Dark Green

Flower Season: n/a



Botanical Name: *Hakonechloa macra 'Aureola'*

Common Name: Japanese Forest Grass, Hakone Grass

Plant Type: Grass

Sun: Half

Water: Medium, Extra in Summer

This weeping grass has amazing foliage: long thin green leaves have gold edgings. It can slowly reach 15" tall and spread about 24", with a clumping habit. Yellow green flowers appear in summer. Sun requirements are a bit tricky: the variation in leaves are more pronounced in sun but this grass burns in hot summer areas. In complete deep shade, the gold edges turn to lime green. Thus, it does best in cool summer areas. Leaves turn pinkish in fall. It does best in well draining, fertile, moist soil. May need to water more during hot summer months. Prune leaves in winter. A beautiful grass t ...

Plant Height: 1-3'

Flower Color: Green, Yellow

Attracts Wildlife: n/a

Leaf Color: Gold, Green, Variegated

Flower Season: Spring



Botanical Name: *Helictotrichon sempervirens*

Common Name: Blue Oat Grass

Plant Type: Perennial, Grass

Sun: Full, Half

Water: Low

The Blue Oat Grass is an evergreen, blue clumping grass that grows 2' tall and 3' wide. Foliage is thin blue grey, wiry leaves that radiate from center of plant. Its showy tan flowers are on spikes 1'-2' above the foliage (flowers more common in cooler winter areas). This plant looks good alone as well as in mass plantings. It does well in full sun or light shade. Established plants need only occasional watering. It does best with well draining soil. The blue oat grass likes dry hill sides.

Plant Height: 1-3'

Flower Color: White

Attracts Wildlife: n/a

Leaf Color: Blue Green, Grey Green

Flower Season: Summer



Botanical Name: *Juncus patens*

Common Name: California Gray Rush

Plant Type: Grass

Sun: Full, Half, Shade

Water: Low, Medium

Although a wetland plant, *Juncus patens* can tolerate fairly dry conditions. It will slowly clump to 2'-3' wide and tall. It tolerates full sun to full shade. This California native can adapt to various watering needs: it can be planted in a pond or used in dry shade or full sun with occasional irrigation. This attractive perennial, mostly thought of as a grass, has thin, gray green, vertical stems. Leaves look like small brown sleeves near the plant base and can have a sharp edge. This is a great plant for containers and dry shade. It is deer resistant. It has spreading rhizomes. Mostly g ...

Plant Height: 1-3'

Flower Color: n/a

Attracts Wildlife: n/a

Leaf Color: Grey Green

Flower Season: n/a



Botanical Name: *Lomandra 'Platinum Beauty'*

Common Name: Platinum Beauty™ Lomandra

Plant Type: Grass

Sun: Full, Half

Water: Low

This perennial grass reaches about 3' in height. Leaves are glossy green with white variegation, shiny, firm, flat. Each cluster has a sharp, slender, straw-colored bract at its base, which gives it a dense spike-like structure. It flowers in late winter/early spring, with fruiting 1-2 months after flowering. The plant is tolerant of sandy, loamy and clay soils. It can grow in semi-shade (light woodland) or no shade. It is a low water needing plant.

Plant Height: 1-3'

Flower Color: Yellow

Attracts Wildlife: n/a

Leaf Color: Dark Green, White, Variegated

Flower Season: Summer



Botanical Name: *Lomandra longifolia 'Breeze'*

Common Name: Dwarf Mat Rush

Plant Type: Grass

Sun: Full, Half

Water: Low

This perennial grass reaches about 3' in height. Leaves are glossy green, shiny, firm, flat. The scented flowers are pollinated by beetles. Each cluster has a sharp, slender, straw-colored bract at its base, which gives it a dense spike-like structure. It flowers in late winter/early spring, with fruiting 1-2 months after flowering. The plant is tolerant of sandy, loamy and clay soils. It can grow in semi-shade (light woodland) or no shade. It is a low water needing plant.

Plant Height: 1-3'

Flower Color: Yellow

Attracts Wildlife: n/a

Leaf Color: Dark Green

Flower Season: Summer



Botanical Name: *Miscanthus sinensis*

Common Name: Eulalia Grass, Japanese Silver Grass

Plant Type: Perennial, Grass

Sun: Full

Water: Medium, Extra in Summer

Miscanthus sinensis is popular ornamental grass. Red flowers are held well above foliage clumps, appearing in summer, and may be cut for fresh or dry arrangements. This plant is highly invasive and really should not be planted in many parts of California. Go to www.rightplant.org to get more regional info. *Miscanthus* needs full sun and watering at least once a week and more during hot summers. Foliage is variegated, with a thin white band down the center. This grass does great in coastal as well as warm inland valleys.

Plant Height: 3-6', 6-12'

Flower Color: Red

Attracts Wildlife: n/a

Leaf Color: Green, White, Variegated

Flower Season: Summer



Botanical Name: *Miscanthus sinensis* 'Little Kitten'

Common Name: Dwarf Silver Eulalia Grass

Plant Type: Perennial, Grass

Sun: Full, Half

Water: Low, Extra in Summer

Dwarf Eulalia Grass is a terrific residential garden performer. It's moderate size, 1.5' feet tall and wide, making it a perfect size for a shrub border. It throws up white spike flowers 2.5' tall and wide that last for 2 months in the winter months or late fall.

Plant Height: 1-3'

Flower Color: White

Attracts Wildlife: n/a

Leaf Color: Green, Silver

Flower Season: Winter, Fall



Botanical Name: *Miscanthus sinensis* 'Morning Light'

Common Name: Morning Light Silver Grass

Plant Type: Grass

Sun: Full, Half

Water: Medium, Extra in Summer

The 'Morning Light' is also a taller variety, growing to 6'-8' tall and 4'-5' wide. It has delicate feathery plumes and very thin graceful leaves. This is a variegated form with white leaf margins that shimmer in sun. It should receive sun to part shade, and average watering but more during hot spells. This plant looks better with more irrigation. Tall grasses are highly combustible.

Plant Height: 6-12'

Flower Color: Red

Attracts Wildlife: n/a

Leaf Color: Green, Silver, White, Variegated

Flower Season: Summer, Fall



Botanical Name: *Miscanthus transmorrisonensis*
Common Name: Evergreen Eulalia
Plant Type: Grass
Sun: Full, Half
Water: Very Low, Extra in Summer

This grass will reach 2.5'-3.5' tall and has narrow, green leaves. Eulalia will arch and have an 8' wide spread. Golden flower spikes appear in spring, lasting through winter, shooting up 6' tall. Eulalia is drought tolerant once it's established but give occasional water to spruce it up. It prefers full to part sun. Give this grass some width area.

Plant Height: 1-3'
Flower Color: Gold
Attracts Wildlife: n/a
Leaf Color: Green
Flower Season: Winter, Spring, Summer, Fall



Botanical Name: *Muhlenbergia capillaris*
Plumetastic®
Common Name: Pink Muhly 'Plumetastic®'
Plant Type: Shrub, Grass
Sun: Full
Water: Medium

Plumetastic Muhly Stately has very showy foliage, with exceptional upright and slightly arching form. Glittering clouds of vivid purple plumes emerge in late summer and persist through fall. Lends far richer color and more uniform bloom than others of its type. Outstanding texture for specimen plant or en masse in borders, meadows and native gardens. Wonderful planted in mass with a solid wall background to highlight the flowers. Also attractive planted in the open next to a pond or pool. The delicate, airy flowers wave and shimmer in the wind. This plant is versatile and can be mixed into ...

Plant Height: 1-3', 3-6'
Flower Color: Pink
Attracts Wildlife: n/a
Leaf Color: Green
Flower Season: Fall



Botanical Name: *Muhlenbergia dubia*
Common Name: Pine Muhly
Plant Type: Grass
Sun: Full
Water: Very Low

This attractive grass reaches 3' tall (with blooms) and wide. Foliage is narrow, green, and evergreen. This plant forms a clump with erect, tan flowers spikes in summer and fall. It prefers full sun in well draining soil. It is drought tolerant once it's established. Heat and cold tolerant.

Plant Height: 1-3'
Flower Color: White
Attracts Wildlife: n/a
Leaf Color: Green
Flower Season: Summer, Fall



Botanical Name: *Muhlenbergia rigens*

Common Name: Deer Grass

Plant Type: Grass

Sun: Full, Half

Water: Low

Fast-growing, warm season perennial grass with dense, handsome, mounded form. Spike-like flower stalks rise 2'-3' above foliage in summer. Good on banks of seasonal creeks, along roads or in gullies where runoff forms in winter. Prefers sun, not picky about soil, and looks best with water once or twice a month once it's established. Very long-lived.

Plant Height: 1-3'

Flower Color: n/a

Attracts Wildlife:

Leaf Color:

Flower Season: Summer



Botanical Name: *Panicum virgatum*

Common Name: Switch Grass

Plant Type: Perennial, Grass

Sun: Full

Water: High

This perennial grass will grow 3-6' tall and 2-3' wide. It has narrow, deep green and gray green leaves with slender, light-colored flowers (panicles) that bloom in midsummer. During fall, foliage turns yellow with hints of orange, then turning tan colored in winter. Panicles are source of food for birds during winter. This grass prefers full sun with wet, sandy or clay soil. It's a great plant for water or bog gardens. Cut back to the ground in early spring to keep it tidy.

Plant Height: 3-6'

Flower Color: White

Attracts Wildlife: Birds

Leaf Color: Green, Grey Green

Flower Season: Summer



Botanical Name: *Sesleria autumnalis*

Common Name: Autumn Moor Grass

Plant Type: Grass

Sun: Full

Water: Medium

A small, mounding grass with yellow-green leaves that reaches 12" high. In the fall, it sends up narrow flower stems that have a silvery-white inflorescence. When planted in masses, it has a striking appearance. It is drought tolerant.

Plant Height: 1-3'

Flower Color: White

Attracts Wildlife: n/a

Leaf Color: Green, Light Green, Yellow Green

Flower Season: Fall