Grasses and Grasslike Plants

_Acorus gramineus_ (Japanese Sweet Flag)
Sweet flag in general likes moist soil and either sun or shade; it is evergreen.

‘*Minimus Aureus*’ has yellow foliage, likes shade, and is a miniature (4”), great for between stepping stones and in containers.

‘*Ogon*’ is a tufted variety with brilliant yellow variegated foliage. Good for wet soils. 12”

‘*Variegatus*’ has cream and green variegated foliage, and is great for containers. 12”

_Anemanthele lessoniana AKA Stipa arundinacea_ (Pheasant Grass)
This grass forms dense tussocks of arching, fine textured foliage that is medium green in summer, with various gold and orange tints appearing in winter. It likes a sunny, well-drained location, is evergreen, and grows 2-3’ tall.

_Briza media_ (Rattle Grass or Quaking Grass)
Rattle grass is a low growing (12”) green grass with heart shaped flowers that shimmer in a breeze. It makes a good cut flower. Evergreen; shear in late summer to remain attractive into the winter. Plants will self-sow. It likes sun and rich fertile soil.

_Calamagrostis x acutiflora_ (Variegated Feather Reed Grass)
This grass like sun or partial shade and moist soil. It dies back in winter.

‘*Avalanche*’ More deeply variegated than ‘Overdam’, with wider blades. 3-4’.

‘*Karl Foerster*’ is a great vertical accent, with green blades, and early flowers. The flowers are reddish-bronze turning buff. 2-3’.

_Carex albula_ (Frosty Curls Sedge)
Frosty Curls sedge has very fine wispy curly foliage, making it a great edging plant. It is drought tolerant and takes sun to partial shade. It grows 18-24” tall and is evergreen.

_Carex buchananii_ (Leatherleaf sedge)
Leatherleaf sedge has upright (to 2’) and tufted foliage especially when young. The narrow foliage is copper-bronze in color. It likes sun and good drainage and is evergreen.

‘*Fox Red*’ has curly red-bronze foliage.

‘*Red Rooster*’ has bright rusty red foliage.

_Carex caryophylllea ‘The Beatles’_
This grass has deep green narrow foliage. It makes a good low-growing (6”) evergreen ground cover that is slow to spread. It likes sun and moist soil.
**Carex comans** (New Zealand Hair Sedge)
This sedge has narrow, usually silvery evergreen foliage which can reach 6′ long if undisturbed. It mounds to about 1 1/2′, then lies limp; it will flow like water over a wall or slope. It like moist soil and either sun or shade.

‘Bronze’ is a very nice bronze form, a little smaller than the species.
‘Frosted Curls’ has curled silvery green foliage which twists at the tips.

**Carex dypaece** (Autumn Sedge)
This 2-3′ evergreen sedge has foliage which is reddish green at the base becoming more orange at the tips. It likes sun and moist to boggy soil.

**Carex dolicostachya ‘Kaga Nishiki’**
This grass is a 12-14” lacy beauty with fine gold variegation. Leaves are medium green in the center and gold at the edges and form a symmetrical fountain-like mound. Long-lived, evergreen, and durable. It likes light shade and moist fertile soil.

**Carex elata ‘Aurea’** (Bowles Golden Sedge)
This graceful plant grows upright to about 30”. The leaves are mostly yellow with faint random longitudinal green stripes. Yellow color is more intense in sun. Shady siting is necessary in drier soils, in which case leaves are rich lime-yellow in color. In boggy moist soil, it will take full sun. Not evergreen.

**Carex flagellifera** (Weeping New Zealand Sedge)
A mounding 18” sedge, usually bronze, especially good in containers. It takes sun or part shade, moist to dry soil, and is evergreen. A flexible and useful plant!

‘Bronzita’ has pinky-bronze leaves.

**Carex morrowii**
This is a 12-18” clump-forming sedge with stiff, arching, pointed evergreen leaves. It likes sun or shade and moist soil.

‘Aureomarginata’ or ‘Aureo-Variegata’ has gold to yellow stripes.
‘Ice Dance’ is a creeping groundcover version with distinct creamy white margins.
‘Silver Scepter’ has consistent creamy variegation.

**Carex oshimensis ‘Evergold’** Same as C. morrowii Aureomarginata.

**Carex testacea** (Orange Sedge)
Orange sedge has 18” evergreen copper-brown foliage, turning more orange in the winter. Clump forming, great accent. Orange sedge takes sun or part shade and drought to moist soil.

‘Prairie Fire’ is olive with orange highlights in the summer; it turns rich russet-orange in winter.

**Carex tenuiculmis ‘Cappuccino’**
Red-bronze 16” foliage, nice clumping form. Evergreen. Likes moist rich soil and sun to part shade.
Grasses

**Chasmanthium latifolium** (Northern Sea Oats)
Sea Oats have 4’ bamboo-like foliage, but are especially valued for the dangling oat-like spikes held on slender nodding stems above the leaves. They make great cut flowers and are attractive through the winter, though not evergreen. They like sun or partial shade, take a wide range of soils, and are good in coastal gardens.

**Cortaderia selloana** (Pampas Grass)
One of the best known ornamental grasses, Pampas Grass is a 4-10’ evergreen fountain of grassy leaves topped by plumes of silver, ivory, tan or pink inflorescences. The flowers are often dried. It likes sun and tolerates most soils and drought.

‘Ivory Feathers’ (aka ‘Pumila’) is a lower growing (3-4’) variety with ivory inflorescences.
‘Pink’ sports delicate pink inflorescences hovering over leaves. It gets 6-10’.
‘Sun Stripe’ is another smaller one—4-6’. It has yellow striped foliage and silvery plumes.

**Deschampsia cespitosa ’Northern Lights’** (Tufted Hair Grass)
Leaves with creamy-white longitudinal stripes, sometimes suffused pink in cool season. Likes sun or part shade and rich, moist soil. 18” tall, not evergreen.

**Elymus arenarius** (Blue Dune Grass)
3-4’ clump forming grass with the strap-like blue-gray foliage. Flower spikes tall and narrow, start blue-green and age to buff. Likes sharply drained soil. Cut back in fall. Can spread from rhizomes.

**Elymus magellanicus** (Blue Wheat Grass)
18” clump forming grass with the most intense blue of all the grasses. Likes light shade in the afternoon and sharply drained soil. Semi-evergreen.

**Festuca glauca** (Blue Fescue)
The classic silvery-blue fine-textured evergreen clumping grass for containers and borders. Foliage is about 9”. Likes sun and well-drained soil, tolerates drought once established.

‘Boulder Blue’ The bluest fescue yet.
‘Elijah Blue’ Beautiful blue foliage holds its color all year. Durable selection.
‘Gold Toupee’ Tight 8” tall mounds of chartreuse yellow to golden foliage.

**Festuca idahoensis** ssp. roemeri (Roemer’s Fescue)
Bluish gray-green foliage characterizes this tough little Rocky Mountain native. Thin 3-7” leaves give a softer effect than regular blue fescue. It need full sun and well-drained soil.

**Hakonechloa macra** (Japanese Forest Grass)
This 12-14” cascading grass truly is a forest dweller; it likes shade and moist well-drained soil.

‘Albo-striata’ has thick and thin white stripes on a green background. It tolerates a bit more sun.
‘All Gold’ forms pure gold weeping mounds that add grace to your garden. Flows nicely in the wind.
‘Aureola’ is a slow spreading cream-white to yellow variegated form which will add elegance to any shade border. Cooler temperatures in spring and fall induce suffusions of pink and red to the foliage.
**Helictotrichon sempervirens** (Blue Oat Grass)
An all-time favorite, this silvery evergreen blue grass blends well in a perennial border or large container. It produces a dense tufted 2' clump. Delicate inflorescences appear in late spring. It likes sun and fertile well-drained soil.  

‘Sapphire Blue’ is bluer than the species, with light tan inflorescences.

**Imperata cylindrica ‘Red Baron’** (Japanese Blood Grass)
20” leaves are upright, emerging green at the base and red at the tips in spring. The red increases over summer becoming solid and intense in late summer and autumn. It likes sun and moist fertile soil.

**Isolepis cernua** (Fiber Optic Grass)—aka *Scirpus cernuus*
Very fine, 12” bright green leaves are tipped with tiny inflorescences looking like fiber optic beads. Likes sun and moist fertile soil. Evergreen

**Juncus effusus** (Soft Rush)
Architecturally interesting 12-15” evergreen bog plant. Many forms have spiral/twisted foliage. Likes sun.  

‘Spiralis’ is the standard spiral form with darker foliage.  

‘Unicorn’ is a spiral form with thicker and shorter foliage than ‘Spiralis’.

**Juncus inflexus** (European Meadow Rush)
Very similar to Soft Rush, but powder-blue 10” stems are thicker and the plant is more robust. It will tolerate some drought once established. Likes sun.  

‘Afro’ (aka ‘Blue Medusa’) has wildly twisted leaves.  

‘Blue Arrows’ is a stiff upright form.

**Liriope muscari** (Blue Lily Turf)
Lily turf is not a grass at all, but as it is a clump-forming 12-18” evergreen perennial with narrow foliage, it is often used as a small grass. It has dark green foliage and violet blooms similar to grape hyacinth. Many varieties are available. It likes partial to full shade and rich moist soil.

**Liriope spicata** (Creeping Lily Turf)
This is the shorter (8”) groundcover lily turf with white to purple blooms. Some variegated varieties are available. Again, it likes partial to full shade and rich moist soil.

**Miscanthus sinensis** (Maiden Grass)
Miscanthus is a graceful evergreen grass with highly decorative flowers which start as tassels and open into airy plumes. It likes full sun and moist, well-drained soil. Different cultivars reach different sizes.

‘Gold Bar’ is a spectacular dwarf form with narrow green foliage striped horizontally with gold. October bloom. Grows to 2-4’.

‘Gracillimus’ is a dwarf form with narrow green foliage and a nice vase shape. October bloom. 2-4’.

‘Malepartus’ Green foliage, wider than usual. Blooms up to a month earlier than others. 6-8’.

‘Morning Light’ has fine textured, arching foliage which appears silver from a distance. Excellent rounded form which blooms late with reddish flowers. Arguably the best all-around Miscanthus. 4’.
Miscanthus sinensis, continued

‘Purpurescens’ (Flame Grass) has green foliage which turns brilliant red in fall, contrasting with the silvery inflorescences. 3-4’.

‘Strictus’ (Porcupine Grass) has very dense green and yellow foliage. White plume flowers. 3-4’.

‘Variegatus’ The white-striped foliage of this antique cultivar provides the strongest white landscape effect of all the Miscanths. Blooms mid-September, strongly red-tinted. 7’.

Molinia caerulea (Variegated Moor Grass)
Moor grass is a deciduous, graceful grass that tolerates low soil fertility, acid soil, and either sun or part shade. It is a slow grower to about 3’ and is good in containers.

‘Sky Racer’ is taller (to 4-5’) than the species with a good inflorescence.

‘Variegata’ has strongly variegated foliage—both flowers and foliage turn golden in fall.

Ophiopogon japonicus (Mondo Grass)
Not a grass at all, but a clump-forming evergreen plant with narrow foliage, so it’s often used like a small grass. It has small violet flowers; there are variegated and dwarf forms available. It likes partial to full shade and moist soil.

Ophiopogon planiscapus ‘Nigrescens’ (Black Mondo Grass)
Again, not a true grass, but used like one. The blackest foliage plant there is, Black Mondo is a slow spreader—great for rock gardens or edging. It likes partial to full shade and moist soil. 6-8” tall.

Panicum virgatum (Blue Switch Grass)
Blue switch grass has very upright, stiff stems usually growing 24-36”. Tolerant of any soil from droughty to moist, it’s an excellent choice for a blue accent in any sunny location.

‘Heavy Metal’ has leaves that are metal-blue and strictly upright. Stems never lean or flop. Strong pink tones in inflorescence.

‘Shenandoah’ Unmatched for burgundy fall color. Leaves green in early summer taking on dark red tones by July and turning wine-colored by September.

Pennisetum alopecuroides (Fountain Grass)
Leaves are narrow to ½ inch wide, green in summer turning golden in autumn. Variable height to 3’. Inflorescences are dense spike-like racemes (“foxtails”). Cut back before seed is produced to prevent self-sowing. Like full sun and moist soil; not hardy.

‘Hameln’ Compact clumps of coarse dark green blades. Buff colored flowers in fall. 1-2’.

‘Little Bunny’ is the smallest of the dwarf fountain grasses at 8-12”. Great for rock gardens.

Pennisetum glaucum ‘Purple Baron’ (Purple Baron Millet)
Deep burgundy, almost black foliage to 30-40” and long-lasting red-purple cattail-like flower spikes. Not hardy in the Northwest. Likes sun but will take shade (foliage gets lighter in the shade); needs regular water.
**Pennisetum orientale**
Low growing, compact and exceptionally floriferous when grown. Blooms from late June into October. Inflorescences fluffy, nearly white with strong pearlescent-pink tints in cool season. Leaves green to gray-green. To 3-4’. Likes sun and well-drained soil. Not evergreen.

‘Karly Rose’ Flowers on this cultivar are rose to purple.

**Pennisetum setaceum rubrum** (Purple Fountain Grass)
Deep burgundy arching clumps to 3-4’ and incredible red-purple inflorescences. Not hardy in the Northwest. Likes sun; tolerates drought.

‘Fireworks’ has variegated foliage—burgundy midvein and hot pink edges. Super container accent!

**Stipa tenuissima (aka Nassella tenuissima)** (Mexican Feather Grass)
Mexican feather grass is a compact (18-24”), slow-growing, fine textured mounding evergreen grass with wispy, buff-colored seed heads. Likes sun or part shade and well-drained soil.

**Uncinia rubra**
Bright red-bronze colored leaves on brown stems. 10-12”. Brown flowers are followed by attractive black seedheads. Like sun/part shade, rich damp soil. Does not tolerate drought. Evergreen.

**Phormium** (New Zealand Flax), **Cordyline** (Dracaena), **Dianella**, and **Yucca** may be used similarly to grasses in some situations. They are dramatic architectural plants characterized by clumps of stiff swordlike leaves.