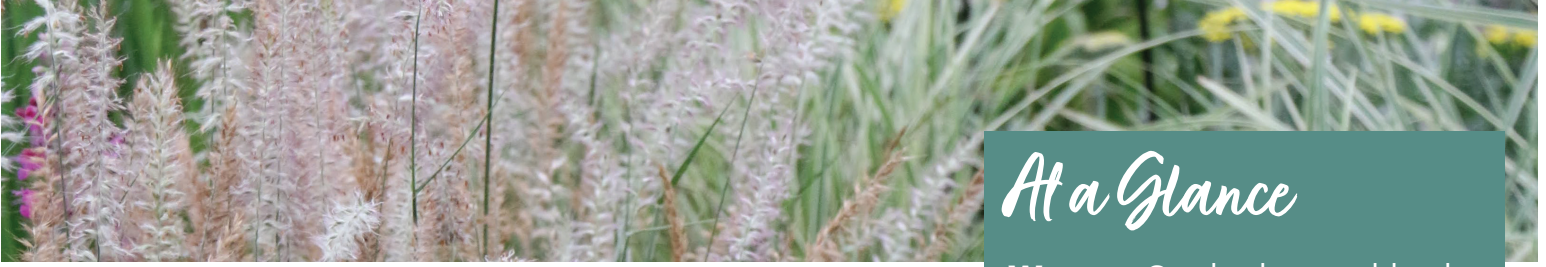


Ornamental Grasses

A guide to caring for and dividing ornamental grasses in Colorado landscapes



At a Glance

Water: Soak thoroughly, by hand if possible, frequently during the plant's first year.

Pruning: Cut back in March or early April.

Fertilizing: Ornamental grasses are not heavy feeders, especially if soil is amended with compost.

Dividing: In the spring when the center of the grass has died back or the grass has outgrown its area, dig up the root ball and divide it into sections using shears or a saw, depending on size.

Planting

Dig a hole slightly wider and deeper than the pot the grass is growing in. Gently break up the root ball after removing from its pot. Plant your grass at the same level that it's growing in its pot. Work a little compost into the soil that you'll be using to fill in around the grass. Gently fill in around the root ball, firming the soil/compost mixture as you go, but avoid packing it down. Add a layer of bark mulch around the plant, if desired.

Watering

Thoroughly soak the entire root ball every 1-2 days, especially if the weather is warm. This usually means hand watering, as most sprinkler systems won't get the job done. Continue to water frequently during the plant's first summer. This applies to drought tolerant grasses as well.

Pruning

Cut your grasses back in March or early April. If your grass has grown very tall or very thick, tie it together with bungee cords about 2 feet up. Then use sharp hedge trimmers or even an electric hedge trimmer to cut the stems about 5-6 inches from the ground. If you're using regular garden pruners, it helps if they've been recently sharpened.

Cut down these grasses earlier in March: Karl Foerster Reed Grass, Overdam Reed Grass, Eldorado Reed Grass, Avalanche Reed Grass, Korean Feather Reed Grass, Northern Sea Oats, Tufted Hair Grass, and Mexican Feather Grass.

These grasses can wait till later in March or early April: Big Blue Stem, Little Blue Stem, Blue Grama, all Maiden Grasses, all Switch Grasses, all Fountain Grasses, Hardy Pampas Grass, and Giant Sacaton. Blue Fescue and Blue Oat Grass can be cut back early in March, or you can gently run your hands through the grass once the new leaves sprout; this will remove the old growth from the previous year.

Fertilizing

Most ornamental grasses need very little fertilizer. If you've amended the soil with compost, you won't need to fertilize. Grasses can become floppy if over-fertilized.

Dividing Ornamental Grasses

How will I know my ornamental grass needs dividing?

Divide it when the center has begun to die out and all the new growth occurs around the perimeter of the clump. Also, if the clump has become too large for the space where it's planted, or if it's crowding other plants, it's time to divide it.

What time of year should I divide them?

It's best to divide grasses in the spring, right after they've sprouted new growth. Then your new divisions will have lots of time to establish new roots. Spring is also best because the top growth of the grass will be smaller, and the soil is usually moister.

How do I divide them?

Ornamental grasses can have dense, massive root systems, so be aware this project is going to take time and muscle. Wear a sturdy pair of gloves! Dig up the entire root ball. The best tool for this is a spade with a sharp digging edge, a spading fork, or both. It's fine if you have to dig the root ball up a portion at a time.

Once the root ball is out of the ground, cut away the dead center of the grass as you divide it into sections. The larger the root ball, the more sections you'll have. To cut the root ball into sections, you can use a pruning saw or a carpenter's saw. For some very large root balls, a chain saw or electric hedge trimmer may be necessary. For smaller root balls, pruning shears may be used to cut it into sections.

What can I do with all of these divisions?

You'll probably want to plant one of the divisions back into its original hole. The remaining sections can be replanted into other areas of your garden or shared with other gardeners. They also look great in ornamental containers on your porch or patio.

How do I care for newly transplanted grasses?

Water them regularly, deeply soaking the roots each time. Plant them in the appropriate sun exposure according to variety.

Grasses for Full Sun (6+ hours direct sun daily):

Big Blue Stem	Shenandoah Switch Grass	Little Bunny Fountain Grass
Variiegated Maiden Grass (Japanese Silver)	Avalanche Reed Grass	Adagio Maiden Grass
Blue Grama	Heavy Metal Switch Grass	Karley Rose Fountain Grass
Zebra Grass (Porcupine Grass)	Eldorado Reed Grass	Gracillimus Maiden Grass
'Blonde Ambition' Blue Grama	Dallas Blues Switch Grass	Little Blue Stem Grass
Yaku Jima Maiden Grass	Korean Feather Reed Grass	Morning Light Maiden Grass
Karl Foerster Reed Grass	Northwind Switch Grass	Hardy Pampas Grass
Mexican Feather Grass	Blue Fescue	Purple Flame Maiden Grass
Overdam Reed Grass	Hameln Fountain Grass	Giant Sacaton Grass
	Blue Oat Grass	

Grasses for Part Sun to Shade (less than 4-6 hours daily):

Japanese Forest Grass	River Mist Northern Sea Oats
Northern Lights Hair Grass	Tufted Hair Grass
Northern Sea Oats	