

# Ornamental Grasses



Come see the animals in our gardens!



At the Virginia Zoo, waving ornamental grasses beckon visitors as they approach the African Okavango Delta Exhibit. Creating a transition from the formality of the entry plaza to the naturalized African exhibit, these easy to care for plants provide year round interest.

In summer, fine textured pennisetums, or fountain grasses, bloom with fuzzy plumes ranging from pinkish tan to almost black. Varying in height from 11" 'Little Bunny' to 40" 'Karley Rose', these mounding clumps anchor the ornamental grass display.

The medium height grasses have a wide range of form and leaf pattern. Upright clumps of miscanthus have feathery plumes and leaves with horizontal yellow stripes ('Zebra Grass'), wide white stripes ('Cosmopolitan'), and narrow white pin stripes ('Morning Light'). Feather Reed Grass, *Calamagrostis* 'Karl Foerster', has 3' clumps of slender leaves topped by tall, exclamation point flower stalks. Finely textured switch grass, *Panicum virgatum* 'Cloud Nine', has airy panicles of flowers over blue-green foliage.

Crowning the Ornamental Grass Garden is *Saccharum arundinaceum*- the hardy sugar cane. This 10' by 10' clumper sends pink plumes skyward in fall. This hardy sugar cane is a favorite treat among the Zoo's grass-eating animals.

Beyond the Ornamental Grass Garden itself, various grasses take their places creating animal habitats, screening views, accenting floral displays, and brightening shady woodlands. Muhly grass, *Muhlenbergia capillaris*, blooms in a pink haze along the entry road in autumn. A ribbon of prairie bluestem grass (*Schizachyrium scoparium*) leads up to the ticket booth. White striped 'Cabaret' miscanthus echoes the fountains as you descend from the entry plaza. Look for the tender, burgundy foliated 'Pele's Smoke' sugar cane in container gardens.

In fall and winter, the swaying grasses rustle in the wind and add sound and motion to the garden. In late winter/early spring, the clumps are tied in bunches (for easy disposal) and cut back to encourage fresh new growth. Care must be taken not to cut into tender new shoots that could be damaged for the entire season. A little water and a little organic fertilizer complete the seasonal maintenance.

Both underfoot and overhead, ornamental grasses share their beauty all around the Virginia Zoo.