Ornamental Grasses in Container Gardens

Lisha Utt, Special to Frederick News Post

Spring is here and the planting season has begun in earnest. Are you thinking about planting some containers? You know you want a tall accent feature but you are tired of spikes. What else could you use? Well, I have got an idea……how about ornamental grasses! Ornamental grasses have been used extensively in the landscape for some time now, but are also gaining popularity in container gardens.

Below are six of my favorite ornamental grasses that work very well in containers. They each make a great accent plant but will not take over the pot like some of the larger grasses. Plus as an added bonus, many of these ornamental grasses are hardy for our area and can be transferred to your garden in the fall.

Carex flagellifera 'Toffee Twist Sedge', Zone 7-10. Toffee Twist has a mounded growth habit with slender unique bronze foliage that gracefully drapes. It grows 18-24" in full sun to part shade. It is beautiful with salmon, light blue and yellow flowering plants.

Imperata cylindrica 'Red Baron', also called Japanese Blood Grass, Zone 6-9. This grass grows 12-15" in an upright, open growth habit. The leaf base is green while the rest of the plant a brilliant red. It grows in full sun to part shade and looks great when paired with yellow, blue, purple and red flowering plants.

Juncus effusus 'Quartz Creek', Zone 4-10. With narrow, round deep green stems, Quartz Creek grows in an upright open habit. Flowers appear on the stem tips in early summer but the value in this plant is in it's foliage. It grows 18-24" in sun to part shade and looks great with any color combination you can imagine.

Melinus nerviglumis 'Pink Champagne', Zone 9-10. Melinus has an upright open growth habit with narrow pale green leaves. It likes full sun to part shade and will grow 8-12". Melinus has ruby-pink blooms that emerge in May and June. As they mature the blooms turn creamy white and rise above the foliage. This grass feels more dainty than the three grasses described above and looks great with pink, white and yellow flowering plants.

Scirpus cernuus 'Fiber Optic', Zone 8-10. This is one of the most interesting grasses I have seen. It is hard to walk by it in the nursery without stopping for a closer look. Fiber Optic grass has flexible bright green foliage that grows 12-18" in a mounded growth habit. It gets it's name from the small white flowers on each stem that stay there all season. It's wonderful in a container with just about any flowering plant or even plant it alone.

Stipa tenuissima 'Pony Tails', Zone 6-10. Pony Tails is a graceful, breezy grass with soft feathery bright green foliage. It is gorgeous with the sunlight shining through or back lit at night. It grows 12-18" in sun to part shade. Pony Tails will give your containers a completely different look. I like it paired with pastel colored flowering plants.

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So if you are looking for something different for your container gardens this year, I hope you'll consider ornamental grasses. There are so many interesting and fun choices. Enjoy!

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