

# Stratford sub Castle Garden Club - December 2020

## GRASSES COULD BE YOUR ANSWER.



Quite a few years ago, on a visit to the Royal Horticultural Society Garden at Harlow Carr near Harrogate, two grasses caught my eye. I had never planted grasses in flower beds before and even the names put me off. They were *Miscanthus transmorrisonensis* and *Miscanthus sinensis* 'Yakushima Dwarf' (image left). See what I mean?

We saw them in late summer and I decided that I would see what they looked like in winter before I made a decision about them. Consequently, one very cold January morning we returned to the (now deserted) gardens. I was so delighted (even though very cold) to see *transmorrisonensis* standing over two metres tall, totally unsupported, blowing in the wind and looking wonderful while all around was dead or dying. 'Dwarf', though much smaller, with its white tufty flower heads, was still perfectly formed.

This is what is so good about grasses. In winter, when evergreen trees and shrubs give strong, firm, structure to the garden, grasses give contrast with delicate looking and fluffy flower heads that sparkle in the low sunlight, especially if they are covered with raindrops or frost. They are lively because they move easily in the wind. Many of them are gold or light yellow coloured by now so give colour contrast as well.

What else is good about them? Well, I have quite a collection of them now and, apart from one, they are all drought tolerant and immune to all the usual garden pests. The only attention that they need is to cut them right down in February, just before the new growth starts. Don't be late with this because if you spoil the new growth it will stay damaged for the rest of the year. Most plants in your garden grow from the top, (think new buds and leaves) whereas grasses grow from the bottom. Plants that look good from May to February are just what a gardener needs and when they have been cut down it is time for the Spring bulbs and flowers to appear.

How best to use them? Unless you are testing how well they perform in your soil probably don't plant them singly. Groups of three or five work well unless you have a large garden and can plant them in drifts, as in a Prairie style. Incidentally, one, in a pot, can look wonderful. As I mentioned earlier, to make your favourite flowering plants show up, plant groups of grasses among them to separate or frame them.

Another good use is as a garden divider. Tall grasses can partially obscure your view across a garden so give you a temporary division of areas or they can make a compost heap disappear. Prairie style planting uses lots of tall grasses with pockets of tall 'daisy' type flowers such as Helenium or Rudbeckia. You could try an area like this in a usual bed or border.

As you have seen, some of the names are not appealing, so, rather than list them here, I invite you to come and look at them in the garden, this winter, when Covid restrictions are lifted. That way you can get the names of the ones you like and I can pass on information of where to buy them and see them growing in vast quantities.

**Barry and the Committee of the Garden Club wish you a peaceful and healthy Christmas and New Year.** The coming few weeks are not going to be full of the usual festivities but there are vaccines on the horizon so we know that things are going to get better.

Meanwhile, plan for normality in the future and treasure plants, trees, parks and gardens and look forward to our meetings again.

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All images on this page - Dorothy Richards.



*Calamagrostis 'Karl Foerster'*



*Miscanthus sinensis  
'Morning Light'*



*Deschampsia  
Goldschleier'*