**Miscanthus sinensis ‘Variegatus’ Variegated Japanese Silver Grass**¹

Edward F. Gilman²

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**Introduction**

This cultivar of Japanese silver grass (maiden grass) has a distinctive, whitish band along each margin of the leaves, displaying a variegated effect. Leaves droop and weep toward the ground, as do many of the other cultivars. Slender leaves originate in a clump, spreading out and up like a fountain. The 5- to 7-foot-tall clumps bear pink flowers in a one-sided inflorescence in late summer and fall that can be used for drying or as a dye plant. Their pinkish or silvery 8- to 10-inch-long plumes persist into the winter. Foliage is flexible and blows easily in the wind. This shrub-like grass turns to a rich gold in the fall; the fall color lasts through the winter.

**General Information**

Scientific name: *Miscanthus sinensis* ‘Variegatus’

Pronunciation: miss-KANTH-us sye-NEN-sis

Common name(s): variegated Japanese silver grass, maiden grass

Family: Gramineae

Plant type: herbaceous; ornamental grass

USDA hardiness zones: 4 through 9 (Fig. 1)

Planting month for zone 7: year round

Planting month for zone 8: year round

Planting month for zone 9: year round

Origin: not native to North America

Uses: mass planting; border; container or above-ground planter; screen; accent

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**Availability:** generally available in many areas within its hardiness range

**Description**

Height: 5 to 7 feet

Spread: 5 to 10 feet

Plant habit: upright

Plant density: moderate

Growth rate: fast

Texture: fine

**Foliage**

Leaf arrangement: alternate

Leaf type: simple

Leaf margin: serrate

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Leaf shape: lanceolate  
Leaf venation: parallel  
Leaf type and persistence: deciduous  
Leaf blade length: more than 36 inches  
Leaf color: variegated  
Fall color: brown or tan  
Fall characteristic: showy

**Flower**  
Flower color: pink  
Flower characteristic: summer flowering; fall flowering

**Fruit**  
Fruit shape: no fruit  
Fruit length: no fruit  
Fruit cover: no fruit  
Fruit color: no fruit  
Fruit characteristic: no fruit

**Trunk and Branches**  
Trunk/bark/branches: typically multi-trunked or clumping stems  
Current year stem/twig color: not applicable  
Current year stem/twig thickness: not applicable

**Culture**  
Soil tolerances: occasionally wet; acidic; sand; loam; clay; slightly alkaline  
Drought tolerance: moderate  
Soil salt tolerances: poor  
Plant spacing: 36 to 60 inches

**Other**  
Roots: not applicable  
Winter interest: plant has winter interest due to unusual form, nice persistent fruits, showy winter trunk, or winter flowers  
Outstanding plant: plant has outstanding ornamental features and could be planted more  
Invasive potential: aggressive, spreading plant  
Pest resistance: no serious pests are normally seen on the plant

**Use and Management**  
Japanese silver grass is frequently used in the landscape as a specimen or screen. It is also employed in group plantings, forming a nice mass of fine-textured foliage. Use Japanese silver grass as an accent or mass planted in a large-scale landscape, such as around a commercial building to add a touch of soft elegance and texture. The slightest breeze moves the foliage, allowing the landscape to come alive. Many people prefer to cut the grass back to the ground in the spring so new green growth is not covered with last year’s dried, brown foliage.

Japanese silver grass requires a location in the landscape that receives full sun, but it is adaptable to most well-drained soils. This ornamental grass is quite drought tolerant. *Miscanthus sinensis* is a warm season grass and transplants best in the spring. Provide good drainage at the planting site.

Other cultivars include ‘Condensatus’, coarser leaf texture than species, mid-summer bloom, 7 to 8 feet tall; ‘Gracilimus’, narrower leaves than species, fall bloom, upright growth habit from 5 to 8 feet tall; ‘Purpureascens’, reddish foliage in summer, purple-red foliage in fall, silver-pink inflorescence, mid-summer bloom, 4 to 5 feet tall; ‘Silver Feather’, silvery white flowers in mid-summer; ‘Strictus’, horizontal yellow bands on foliage, upright growth habit, 6 to 8 feet tall; ‘Yaku Jima’, more compact, 3 to 4 feet tall; ‘Zebrinus’, horizontal yellow bands on foliage, wide-spreading habit, to 7 feet tall.

The propagation of *Miscanthus sinensis* is by division in the spring.

**Pests and Diseases**  
No pests or diseases are of major concern.

Rust diseases occasionally infest the foliage but it often goes away in drier weather.