

Pennisetum setaceum Tender Fountain Grass¹

Edward F. Gilman²

Introduction

Fountain grass is an ornamental grass that is used in the landscape for its fine-textured foliage and showy flowers. Some catalogues refer to the plant as *Pennisetum rupelii*. The leaves of this 3- to 4-foot-tall plant are narrow, curving, linear blades with a beautiful light green cast. The light purple to pink colored inflorescence of fountain grass sits atop a hollow, 3-foot-long, nodding flower stalk. Flowers appear almost white in bright light. The feathery inflorescence is 12 inches long and occurs from early summer to frost. The fruits of this grass are small seeds that volunteer to form small plantlets nearby; this plant is considered mildly invasive if planted near undisturbed natural areas. The invasive habit is likely to be much less a problem in an urban landscape.

General Information

Scientific name: *Pennisetum setaceum*

Pronunciation: pen-niss-SEE-tum set-TAY-see-um

Common name(s): fountain grass, tender fountain grass

Family: *Gramineae*

Plant type: ornamental grass; herbaceous

USDA hardiness zones: 8 through 10 (Fig. 1)

Planting month for zone 8: year round

Planting month for zone 9: year round

Planting month for zone 10 : year round

Origin: not native to North America

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

Availability: generally available in many areas within its hardiness range



Figure 1. Shaded area represents potential planting range.

Description

Height: 4 to 6 feet

Spread: 2 to 4 feet

Plant habit: upright

Plant density: moderate

Growth rate: fast

Texture: fine

Foliage

Leaf arrangement: most emerge from the soil, usually without a stem

Leaf type: simple

Leaf margin: entire

Leaf shape: linear

Leaf venation: parallel

Leaf type and persistence: deciduous

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2. Edward F. Gilman, professor, Environmental Horticulture Department, UF/IFAS Extension, Gainesville, FL 32611.

Leaf blade length: 18 to 36 inches

Leaf color: green

Fall color: brown or tan

Fall characteristic: showy

Flower

Flower color: white

Flower characteristic: summer flowering; fall flowering

Fruit

Fruit shape: unknown

Fruit length: unknown

Fruit cover: unknown

Fruit color: unknown

Fruit characteristic: inconspicuous and not showy

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

Light requirement: plant grows in full sun

Soil tolerances: acidic; slightly alkaline; sand; loam; clay

Drought tolerance: moderate

Soil salt tolerances: unknown

Plant spacing: 36 to 60 inches

Other

Roots: not applicable

Winter interest: no special winter interest

Outstanding plant: plant has outstanding ornamental features and could be planted more

Invasive potential: potentially invasive

Pest resistance: no serious pests are normally seen on the plant

Use and Management

Fountain grass is a valuable accent or specimen plant that may be used around a fountain for the cooling silhouette it presents. This plant is also lovely when planted in mass, and it makes a nice accent in a border. Flowers can be cut for fresh arrangements but they fall apart as they dry, making them unsuited for dry arrangements.

Fountain grass should be planted on a well-drained site that is exposed to full sun. Plants grow poorly in the partial shade and droop over. This grass is grown as a perennial

in most of Florida (zones 8 through 10) but is an annual in cooler climates. Foliage will die back in north Florida in winter, but will reappear in spring if the winter is mild. It is only moderately drought tolerant.

The cultivar 'Rubrum', also known as 'Cupreum', has reddish foliage and flowers. 'Rubrum Dwarf' grows 2 1/2 to 3 feet tall.

Pests and Diseases

No pests or diseases are of major concern.