

Miscanthus (arranged by height)

TWG Editor: *Miscanthus* is a warm-season grass, which takes about 3 years to look mature. It may thrive for decades or get hit hard by cold and clay. Despite improved cultivars, *Miscanthus* is still for the adventuresome Midwest gardener. The late-blooming (October) varieties may never get a chance to bloom in the Midwest's cold, but earlier bloomers may re-seed: double-edged sword! Make sure you plant in spring, so that the roots develop before frost. Mulch around them with 4-6" of chips over winter! Gerry Kopf advises that *Miscanthus* and other exotic grasses fail in heavy clay because there isn't enough oxygen exchange in the soil. Grasses in containers should be grown in a heavy soil mix so that the fibrous roots will adapt faster. If you absolutely *must* plant in fall, make sure you buy a 2-3 gallon container *only*. Since they do not like disturbance, divide by taking wedge-shaped sections from the outer edge, and divide only after green growth begins in May or June. By the way, don't underestimate their size—give them room! This list may not be totally accurate: we're in new territory, but we erred toward conservatism regarding hardiness.

Miscanthus sinensis: Short Varieties (1-3')

'Little Kitten': It's only a foot tall! Brand new, this one is silvery-green and will probably start showing up everywhere. **'Adagio':** 3' silver-gray foliage with buff October flowers. Mulch! **'Burgundy':** 2-4'; New. It has pink flowers in Sept-Oct, red fall foliage. **'Little Fountain'** (fountain-like shape) and **'Little Silver Spider'** (upright) are both 3-4'. September bloomers with promise. **'Nippon':** severe self-seeder in Zone 5-6. **'Yaku Jima':** Not hardy. Use 'Adagio' instead, but mulch. **'Nana'** is a dwarf (3-4') 'Gracillimus'-type. **'Dixieland'** (3-4') is promising—has vertical leaf variegation—but mulch it!

Miscanthus: Medium Varieties (4-6')

4-5': 'Bitsy Ben': This is a short variety discovered at Zone 4b *Bald Eagle Nursery*. It has very showy silver flowers that start blooming in early August but last into December. **'Ferner Osten':** Dark green foliage with silver midrib. Bushy red plumes with white tips in September. Mulch! **'Arabesque'** is not hardy in Zone 4b. **'Kirk Alexander':** see 'Punktchen' below. **'Morning Light'** has white-edged foliage (barely variegated) and a 'Gracillimus' stature. Mulch!

5-6': 'Gold and Silver' has gold flowers in September, turning silver. Slender growth habit. **'Gold Feather'** has golden variegated leaves and is a slow grower. *M. purpurescens* (note name change): The upright foliage turns red quickly in cool snap and purple by fall. Silvery-pink flowers in early August. Very hardy. Big sweep of these is great. **'Red Arrow'** is called by Kurt Bluemel, "truly a great Miscanthus with the best red fall color to date". Does anyone agree? **'Kaskade':** Silver-green foliage turning purple/burgundy in cool weather. Silver plumes in early September. Mulch it! **'Sirene'** is a big hit with customers: reddish leaves after September flowers. **'Sarabande'** is hardy, usu. called the early-blooming 'Gracillimus'.

Miscanthus: Medium Tall Varieties (6-8')

'Gracillimus': 6-7'. The early classic, once called Maiden Grass. Its dark green foliage makes it look great next to variegated *Miscanthus*. The flowers often get cut short by frost in October. Mulch it well, or use **'Graziella'** (6'; September) instead. It is one of the best for silver inflorescences.

'Strictus': Easily confused with 'Zebrinus' because it also has horizontal bands of yellow on the leaves. Both are 6-7' x 6', yellow horizontal bands on upright foliage, want moist soil and can be in water 2-4" deep. Both can take part shade. Often called Porcupine grass, **'Strictus'** is hardier, more erect, better behaved, less spreading than 'Zebrinus' [Zebra Grass]. Both may be replaced by **'Punktchen'** (6') ["little dot"], which has nice contrast of striped foliage and September flower heads, erect growth, and reliable flowering, although **'Kirk Alexander'** (5-6'), but jury's out on hardiness.

'Variegatus' (6'): variegated foliage, may require staking because it may get floppy as it matures. Tolerates some shade. Great for contrast against other cultivars. Buff flowers in late September. Divide every 3 years. **'Wetterfahne'** (6'x6'): The large silver plumes are said to turn into billowy clouds in early September, making for a great specimen. **'Little Big Man':** See *M. giganteus*. **'Malepartus'** (6') is noted for its red color, later turns silvery. Looks great with 'Variegatus'. (Other August red flowers include: **'Jury'**, **'Rotfeder'**, **'Rotsilber'**). **'Blondo':** 6-7', coarse yellow-green foliage, creamy white flowers in October. **'November Sunset'** (6') has October 1st flowers and yellow-orange fall foliage. **'Positano'** (6-7'): Arching foliage with red flowers in September. Good for hedge. **'Undine'** (7') has a better growth habit; blooms silver in early September. **'Grosse Fontaine'** (7-8') has an erect habit, blooms in September. Good for hedge. Mulch! **'Andante':** 7-8'. Bluemel's catalog says this is the best specimen *Miscanthus*. Pink flowers turn silver. **'Bluetenwunder'** (7'; Sept), is a terrible self-seeder. **'Roland'** (7') blooms buff in September. Somewhat coarse, but reliable.

Miscanthus: Tall Varieties (8' and over)

'Silver Feather' (7-8' x 10-12'): This is the hardest *Miscanthus*, surviving in Zone 3 near Minneapolis. Silver mid-rib arching leaves, with large, silvery flowers in early September. Looks great against sunlight. **'Autumn Light'** (7-8') is hardy, blooms buff in October. **'Goliath':** extra large pink bloom in September. Very rigid, dark green foliage.

Silver Banner Grass [*M. sacchariflorus*]: 7-8'. Sometimes sold as Pampas Grass. Buyer beware: it's too invasive. As opposed to *Miscanthus sinensis* which stays in a clump, this grass has rhizomes that may grow 6" in one season. Outlaw it!

Giant Chinese Silver Grass [*M. giganteus (floridulus)*]: 10-12', looks like bamboo, reddish tan tassels in October. Huge! Colonizes, but is not super aggressive. If you want a shorter (6') version, I've read that **'Little Big Man'** is a red-stemmed substitute with jade green leaves and silvery white plumes, but haven't seen it. ☼