

Calamagrostis acutiflora - Feather Reed Grass (*Poaceae* or *Gramineae*)

Calamagrostis acutiflora is a columnar, medium-sized, fine-textured, early-blooming ornamental grass. Feather Reed Grass is known for its early emergence, late spring and early summer inflorescences, summer and autumn grain-like appearance, and vertical architectural lines that can serve as a strong focal point in the landscape.

FEATURES

Form

- medium-sized perennial ornamental grass
- maturing at 3-5' tall x 1-1.5' wide, depending upon cultivar
- upright columnar growth habit



Culture

- full sun to partial sun
- performs best in evenly moist to permanently moist, rich, well-drained soils in full sun, but tolerates dry soils, wet soils, clay soils, heat, and drought
- propagated primarily by clump division in spring
- Grass Family, with virtually no disease or pest problems
- prune back to 4" above the crown in late Feb. or early to mid-Mar. to allow new growth to emerge unhindered (Feather Reed Grass is one of the first ornamental grasses to emerge from dormancy with new foliage growth, so pruning is best achieved in late winter)

Foliage

- the basal clump of semi-evergreen foliage is green in spring and summer, green-brown by late autumn, and mostly buff throughout the winter (although green at the very bottom of the old foliage)
- linear blades mature from 1-3' long x 0.5" wide, often bending partway down the blade as it expands during spring growth, to reach an overall height of 1-2', making the basal foliage well separated from the apical flowering and fruiting stalks

Flowers

- emerging light green, but quickly changing to pink-purple
- fine-textured inflorescences that arise from the center of the foliage clump mature at 3-6' tall and flower during June, swaying gently in the breezes
- inflorescences are initially spread wide open, but quickly constrict within a few days, abscise some floral structures, and hug the flowering stalk as they mature into small fruit grains

Fruits

- small grains are hidden within the upper portions of the narrow fruiting stalks

- the vertical shafts (stalks and terminal grain clusters) give a strong vertical architectural feature to this plant
- fruits slowly shatter throughout late autumn and early winter, leaving behind the thin fruit stalks, which have much less of a winter impact than most other upright ornamental grasses

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Function

- vertical ornamental grass used as a specimen or focal point in group plantings, raised planters, entranceways, or perennial borders

Texture

- fine texture throughout the year
- open density at the top and center of the plant, but thick density at the bottom

Assets

- urban tolerant
- wet or dry site adaptable
- vertical accent or focal point
- first of the larger common ornamental grasses to foliage and bloom

Liabilities

- maintenance in late winter to remove dead foliage and fruiting stalks
- limited winter appeal due to shattering of grains from fruiting stalks by late autumn, leaving behind a thin version of the robust appearance of this ornamental grass from late summer and early autumn

Habitat

- Zones 4 to 8
- Native to Europe

SELECTIONS

Alternates

- other ornamental grasses of vertical stature and medium height (2-5')(*Calamagrostis arundinacea*, *Carex muskingumensis*, *Chasmanthium latifolium*, *Miscanthus sinensis* 'Adagio', *Miscanthus sinensis* var. *purpurascens*, *Panicum virgatum* 'Rotstrahlbusch', *Spodiopogon sibiricus*, etc.)

Variants

- please note: the following 2 cultivars are often confused, switched, and mislabeled in the nursery trade; just bear in mind that 2 forms of Feather Reed Grass commonly exist, and that one is about 1-2' taller than the other
- Calamagrostis acutiflora* 'Karl Foerster' - maturing at 3-5' x 1-1.5', flowering in early June
- Calamagrostis acutiflora* 'Stricta' - maturing at 4-6' x 1.5', flowering in mid-June
- Calamagrostis brachytricha* - Korean Feather Reed Grass - an early autumn blooming form, to 2.5' x 2', upright radiating in its growth habit at flowering, but having a tendency to lodge afterwards; full sun to partial shade, and carries its top heavy fruiting stalks unshattered (although with some completely lodged) throughout the winter
- Calamagrostis arundinacea* 'Overdam' - Variegated Feather Reed Grass - rapidly increasing in popularity, this form resembles 'Karl Foerster' above in size and flowering, but is slower-growing due to its beautifully variegated foliage (white longitudinal stripes along the green blades), which slowly fades to green as the season progresses; full sun to partial shade

