

Miscanthus sinensis - Maiden Grass, Eulalia or Chinese Silver Grass (*Poaceae*)

Miscanthus sinensis is known as an upright to arching, ornamental grass. Maiden Grass has many cultivars that differ in their foliage, inflorescence color, texture, bloom period, and mature height.

FEATURES

Form

- perennial ornamental grass
- dwarf cultivars are 3' tall, most cultivars range from 4-8' tall, and giant cultivars range from 9-15' tall
- upright columnar to upright arching growth habits
- slow to emerge in spring, but with a rapid growth rate thereafter



Culture

- full sun to partial sun
- most Maiden Grass cultivars prefer full sun in occasionally moist to mostly dry, well-drained soils, but are very adaptable to harsh conditions once established, including poor soils, compacted soils, soils of various pH, and especially to heat and drought
- propagated primarily by division of the crown of a parent plant
- Grass Family, with virtually no disease or pest problems
- abundantly available in container form, featuring about 10 cultivars in common circulation from about 40 total
- allow the frost-killed portions to remain throughout the dormant season, as the tan-colored foliage, stalks, and fruiting heads have great winter interest
- shear the dead portions back to 3" above the ground by mid-Apr. (use gloves when handling the subtly serrated foliage), to allow the new growth to emerge unhindered
- about every 3-4 yrs., propagate by division of the clump into several pieces in early spring, after

- shearing the dead foliage away, and discard the center of the clump which has died
- when used as a privacy screen, remember that this function will disappear from the months of Apr. through June due to early spring shearing of the dead foliage, and the height of the new foliage will not reach "screening proportions" until about July
- when sited near bodies of water, *Miscanthus sinensis* should not have its roots in the water table, as it does not tolerate wet or permanently moist soils; however, *Miscanthus sacchariflorus*, along with some other perennial grasses, do well at the water's edge or in the water

Foliage

- linear blades of foliage initially arise directly from the crowns, in an upright then arching habit, and later arise from the vertical stems in an alternate fashion, becoming shorter as they progress up the shaft
- depending upon the specific cultivar, the arching blades may range from 0.25-2" wide, and 3-5' long, sometimes with variegation on the medium-green foliage that is silver, white, cream, or yellow

Flowers

- inflorescences unfurl atop the central vertical stalks, and differ among the numerous cultivars in terms of their time of emergence (late July until frost), color (silver, gold, pinkish, purplish, reddish, or a mixture thereof), separation from the upper foliage (well-separated or immersed within it), and winter persistence (usually persistent, but sometimes slowly shattering)

- inflorescences somewhat resemble corn tassels in their appearance, but are usually much more dense and arch to one side of the stalk

Fruits

- small grains are hidden within the fruiting structure (which is usually thought of as the spent inflorescence), and usually do not self-sow

USAGE

Function

- often used as a specimen or focal point, but also commonly found at foundations or entranceways, along borders, in group or mass plantings, in raised planters, near bodies of water, or as privacy screens
- important from a design standpoint, where "movement in the landscape" (referring to its swaying in the breezes) is an important element

Texture

- fine, medium, or bold texture, depending upon cultivar
- thick density

Assets

- very urban tolerant, especially to heat, drought, and poor soils
- numerous cultivars that differ in height, foliage

variegation, and floral color
-excellent for its swaying in gentle breezes
-winter appeal of the dead foliage and fruiting heads
-rapid establishment

Liabilities

-yearly maintenance requirement of early spring shearing and cleanup of dead foliage, stalks, and fruiting heads
-dying out of the center of the clump with age

Habitat

-Zones 5 to 9 for many cultivars, but some are only cold hardy to zones 6 or 7
-species form is native to Eastern Asia

SELECTIONS

Alternates

-other ornamental grasses of upright growth habit, and generally in the 4-6' height range (*Calamagrostis acutiflora*, *Panicum virgatum*, etc.)

Variants

-no other ornamental grass has so many cultivars; a few are listed below:
-*Miscanthus sinensis* 'Adagio' - ultra-thin foliage (0.25" wide) of fine texture is medium green with a silvery-white midrib, with golden-pinkish flowers in mid-Aug. that mature to silvery-tan fruits in Sept., to 5' tall
-*Miscanthus sinensis* 'Gracillimus' - fine-textured due to its ultra-thin but very long medium green foliage, with pinkish flowers in early Oct. (unless an early frost occurs), to 8' tall, more formal and dense in appearance than most cultivars, becoming vased and arching late in the season, and with great winter appeal; an improved cultivar that is slightly smaller is 'Graziella', to 6' tall, with silvery inflorescences and an excellent autumn color blend of subtle warm hues

-*Miscanthus sinensis* 'Morning Light' - very thin white leaf margins with ultra-thin medium green

foliage (0.25" wide), making it appear gray-green-silver from a distance, with pinkish flowers that occur in some years at the time of frost, to 4' tall, good for areas that require a smaller upright grass of fine texture, or when subtle variegation is needed

-*Miscanthus sinensis* var. *purpurascens* ('Purpurascens') - Flame Grass - to 4' tall and of medium texture, having 1" wide leaf blades with the upper foliage held horizontally from the stiff stalks, with purple-silver inflorescences in Aug., and undergoing a foliage transition from green to flaming orange-red during the 3-week period immediately before frost, by which time the inflorescences have changed to silver fruits, giving the juxtaposition of the smokey fruits held just above the flaming foliage (and thus the plant's common name), with the foliage later changing to a russet brown in early autumn, before fading to tan in winter

-*Miscanthus sinensis* 'Strictus' - Porcupine Grass - emerging in spring with stiffly upright green foliage to 0.75" wide, it soon acquires horizontal golden-yellow bands of variegation on the stiff foliage (hence the common name), with the variegation sometimes suffused with tinges of red-purple, to 7' tall and of bold texture, with pinkish-gold inflorescences, an improvement over 'Zebrinus', the latter of which lodges (flops over) with age and rainfall, and from which 'Hinjo' (also known as 'Little Nicky') is derived, a dwarf form to 3' tall

-*Miscanthus sinensis* 'Variegatus' - to 6' tall, slow to establish, and often flopping with age, does well in full sun to partial shade, with creamy-white thin stripes of variegation throughout the leaves and on the margins giving it a medium-bold texture; improved modern-day releases that are more upright with creamy variegation include 'Cabaret', 'Cosmopolitan', and 'Silberpfeil' ('Silver Arrow')