

# *Phalaris arundinacea* var. *picta* - Ribbon Grass (*Poaceae*)

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*Phalaris arundinacea* var. *picta* is known as an ornamental grass often used as a tall groundcover, in full sun to partial shade. Ribbon Grass has striped variegated foliage that forms a solid dense mat.

## FEATURES

### Form

- small- to medium-sized perennial ornamental grass or tall non-traditional groundcover
- 1' tall in full sun, 1.5' tall in partial sun, and up to 3' tall in partial shade, spreading continuously at its perimeter to form a dense groundcover
- procumbent mat growth habit
- slow to medium growth rate (at the perimeter of its spread)



### Culture

- full sun to partial shade
- best performance occurs in moist, well-drained soils in partial sun, but very tolerant of poor soils, sandy soils, dry soils, wet soils, and full sun
- propagated by division of the clump in spring
- Grass Family, with virtually no disease or pest problems
- moderately available in container form
- like other ornamental grasses, there is a need to shear the dead top growth back to the ground in early spring to allow the new growth to emerge unhindered, but unlike most ornamental grasses, the chore is relatively easy to perform and clean up, as the dead stubble is not thick nor stiff, and is easily bagged or composted
- invasive by underground rhizomes, which need to be periodically culled from the edge of the planting to maintain the grass within its designated boundary (alternatively, placement of a deep plastic edging along its boundary, or planting the grass within a large plastic pot [with holes in the bottom] sunk into the ground, will greatly assist in restricting it to a given space)
- if the foliage becomes sun-scorched in mid-summer, simply mow or weedwack it to the ground, lightly fertilize and irrigate, and fresh new growth will emerge within 2 weeks
- occasional non-variegated green-foliaged reversions need to be immediately rogued (removed by digging) from the clump, as these sports will be more vigorous and taller, and eventually take over from the slightly weaker, variegated form

### Foliage

- lanceolate to narrow ovate leaves emerge briefly with pink and white variegation, but quickly change to longitudinal stripes (or ribbons) of green and white variegation as they expand (hence the common names of Garden's Garters, resembling striped garters

or suspenders, or Ribbon Grass)

-alternate along the vertical stems, wrapping around the thin stems in a sessile manner (with no petioles), with the blades arching at maturity

-moderate to severe scorching occurs in mid-to late summer if heat and drought have been moderate or severe

-foliage turns a tan color with frost, and slowly withers back to the ground throughout the winter

### Flowers

-rare or sparse, white to pink, in June and July, on a 2' stalk

-not overly ornamental, and often sparse or not present at all

### Fruits

-small grains hidden within the fruiting stalk, rare and ornamentally insignificant

## USAGE

### Function

-focal point short ornamental variegated grass, forming a dense mat of tall groundcover in sunny or partially shaded sites

-often sited at entranceways, borders, foundations, raised planters, and near or at the edge of bodies of water, typically in mass plantings where the variegated foliage effect is most dramatic

### Texture

-medium texture

-thick density

### Assets

-wet-site adaptable

-dry-site adaptable (but usually with the liability of leaf scorch)

-showy variegated grass with a relatively low, spreading, groundcover habit is virtually unique in the landscape for sunny spots

### Liabilities

-invasive growth by underground rhizomes

-prone to summer leaf scorch when sited in full sun

### Habitat

-Zones 4 to 9

-Native to Europe and North America

## SELECTIONS

### Alternates

-grasses of low height when sited in full sun (*Festuca glauca*, *Helictotrichon sempervirens*, *Pennisetum alopecuroides* 'Cassian' or 'Little Bunny', etc.)

-variegated grasses with a semi-groundcover habit for partially shaded to fully shaded environments (*Acorus gramineus* 'Argenteostriatus', *Glyceria maxima* 'Variegata', *Hakonechloa macra* 'Aureola', etc.)

### Variants

-*Phalaris arundinacea* var. *picta* - (often listed as *Phalaris arundinacea* 'Picta') is the standard variegated form sold in the nursery trade; cultivars differ in variegation color or dwarf habit, but have rare availability

