



Cooperative Extension Service
Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences

*Pennisetum alopecuroides*¹

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Introduction

Also known as *Pennisetum japonicum*, Fountain Grass is an elegant, fine-textured ornamental grass reaching a height of 3 to 4 feet with an equal spread (Fig. 1). Coppery tan flowers resembling bottle brushes appear in the summer on the outside of the canopy. These attractive, 5- to 7-inch-long flowers persist on the plant from summer to fall but shatter in the early winter. Seeds are widely dispersed giving rise to seedlings in the garden and surrounding landscapes. It can invade surrounding landscapes and becomes a weed in this manner. The foliage of Fountain Grass is bright green during the summer, but turns to a golden brown color in the fall after the flowers begin to die. The foliage arches near the tip and gives the plant a graceful fountain shape.

General Information

Scientific name: *Pennisetum alopecuroides*

Pronunciation: pen-niss-SEE-tum al-loe-peck-yer-ROY-deez

Common name(s): Australian Fountain Grass, Chinese Fountain Grass, Fountain Grass

Family: *Gramineae*

Plant type: ornamental grass; herbaceous

USDA hardiness zones: 5 through 9 (Fig. 2)

Planting month for zone 7: year round

Planting month for zone 8: year round

Planting month for zone 9: year round

Origin: not native to North America

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

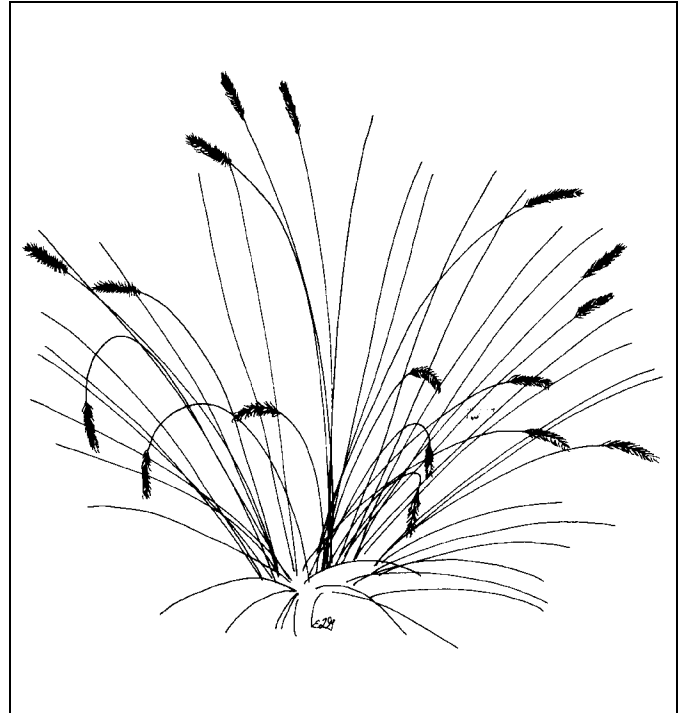


Figure 1. Australian Fountain Grass.

Availability: somewhat available, may have to go out of the region to find the plant

Description

Height: 3 to 4 feet

Spread: 3 to 4 feet

Plant habit: upright

Plant density: moderate

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Figure 2. Shaded area represents potential planting range.

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

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: high

Soil salt tolerances: unknown

Plant spacing: 36 to 60 inches

Other

Roots: not applicable

Winter interest: plant has winter interest due to unusual form, nice persistent fruits, showy winter trunk, or winter flowers

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

Invasive potential: potentially invasive

Pest resistance: long-term health usually not affected by pests

Use and Management

This graceful plant has a beautiful effect when its image is reflected in water. It is usually massed together in a landscape bed or planted alone or in a small grouping in a perennial border to provide fine texture. It is suited for the residential landscape more than most other ornamental grasses because of its small size. It can 'make' a landscape with its extremely fine texture that provides a cooling effect as it blows in even the slightest breeze. Fountain grass also makes an effective, tall ground cover plant or single specimen plant.

Fountain Grass needs to be planted in a site that receives full sun and has well-drained soils. Be prepared to provide some irrigation during dry weather in the summer. The center of the plant becomes open as the plant ages with most of the stems originating along the margin of an open ring. Divide the open clump and replant to rejuvenate it.

Cultivars include 'Hameln' and 'Weserbergland' which are dwarf cultivars growing 2- to 3-feet-tall. 'Hameln' does not reseed itself into the landscape.

The propagation of this grass is by division.

Pests and Diseases

No pests or diseases are of major concern.