

Skin of the Earth

Native grasses in the garden

Grases are an essential and often dominant component of natural landscapes, yet native grasses are scarce in the Willamette Valley. Farming did away with most native grasslands. Those that remained were quickly invaded by introduced grasses that easily out-compete native bunchgrasses. Bunchgrasses are relatively non-aggressive, and compatible with the non-grass, herbaceous flowering plants that most native gardeners want to grow. They are also beautiful. Including grasses in native gardens makes the gardens look more natural and visually interesting. It may even help in maintaining healthy populations of some of these species.

Although grasses are a vital component of many ecosystems, to the average gardener “grass” means either turf grass or weeds. It’s true that ornamental grasses are gaining in popularity, but they are still an afterthought for many of us and we are mostly pretty weak on grass identification. Many grasses look alike to us, and it can be difficult to tell at first what’s a desirable grass and what is a weed.

So when I began to plan a native zone, complete with grasses, in my own yard, I decided to begin with a small number of grass species that I felt sure I could tell apart from one another. I also wanted to use grasses that are available as plant

starts, not just as seed, so I will get to know the grasses better before I have to distinguish their seedlings from the zillion other grasses that fall out of the Willamette Valley sky. Since the area involved is small, I didn’t need a large number of starts.

My native zone consists of a flat area with rising banks on two sides. The flat part (the “wetland”) is squishy wet in winter and dries out slowly in summer, while the banks (my “upland slopes”) drain more readily and dry out by July. Both areas used to be covered with turf. They were smother-mulched in fall of 2009 with newspaper and wood chips and bark mulch, and left mostly unplanted for over a year to ensure that the existing grass was dead.

Meanwhile I admired a tall, wide bladed grass in my neighbor Whitey Lueck’s garden and asked him what it was. Blue wild rye (*Elymus glaucus*) was the answer. Lueck described it as his native bunch grass of choice, for its adaptability to a variety of conditions. He gave me some starts, which did very well. It seems to grow anywhere, wet or dry, in sun or shade. It can be cut back any time it gets untidy, and extras are easy to pull out. I already have seedlings, which are quite distinctive.

The next step was to acquire some Roemer’s fescue (*Festuca roemerii*), which naturalists consider the dominant grass of



Tufted hairgrass

our upland prairies. It also grows in oak woodland and well drained meadows. This pretty, blueish-green, fine-textured grass won’t tolerate saturated soil. My plants, set out on the banks in early spring this year, grew readily, flowered quite early and then turned bone white, even before the ground dried out. I’m waiting to see if they come back to life when it rains. If not, I am hoping for some seedlings.

Anyone who travels through the valleys around Eugene should have noticed tufted hairgrass (*Deschampsia caespitosa*) making a golden haze over low-lying meadows in early summer — often the same damp meadows that earlier were blue with camas flowers. It is perhaps the only plant I have seen described as actually preferring poorly drained soils. It certainly likes mine. This very distinctive grass has a low tuft of rather stiff, deep green leaves from which emerges a fountain of tall stems (or culms), each stem topped by an airy panicle of bloom. The foliage stays green for a long time.

I got my grasses from a variety of sources, including Doak Creek Nursery and the nursery at Buford Park, which has a plant sale every spring. Other local nurseries that sell native grass plugs include Balance (wholesale only) and Trillium Gardens, both in Eugene, and Seven Oaks Native Plant Nursery in Albany. The nursery at Buford Park can also supply small quantities of seed.

Landscape ecologist Jason Blazar says all three of these grasses I’ve tried are easily propagated from seed. Simply broadcast over bare ground, he says, and plants should germinate in 10-30 days if sown Sept. 30 to Nov. 15.

Among other grasses Blazar suggested I might try are three for moderately drained soils such as you find at the margins of wetlands: California brome (*Bromus carinatus*), California oatgrass (*Danthonia californica*) and June grass (*Koeleria macrantha*). **EW**

Rachel Foster of Eugene is a writer and garden consultant. She can be reached at rfoster@efn.org

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LEGAL NOTICES

NOTICE IN THE CIRCUIT COURT OF THE STATE OF OREGON FOR LANE COUNTY, Probate Department. In the matter of the Estate of Dale Walter Canaday, Deceased. Case No. 50-11-18224. **NOTICE TO INTERESTED PERSONS.** Claims against

the estate of Dale Walter Canaday, deceased, must be presented to Terence Canaday, who is the personal representative appointed by the Lane County Circuit Court, at 767 Willamette St., Suite 208, Eugene, Oregon 97401, within four (4) months from September 8, 2011 or such claims may be barred. All persons whose rights may be affected by these proceedings may obtain additional information from the court records, the personal representative, or Kelsea J. Feola, attorney for the personal representative. Terence Canaday, Personal Representative Diment & Walker, Attorneys for the Estate 767 Willamette Street, Suite 208, Eugene, OR 97401

IN THE CIRCUIT COURT OF THE STATE OF OREGON FOR LANE COUNTY Probate Department In the Matter of the Estate of KEVIN DANIEL ELKINS, Deceased. No. 50-11-01768 **NOTICE TO INTERESTED PERSONS** Notice is hereby given that Mary E. Bunch has been appointed and has qualified as the personal representative of the estate. All persons having claims against the estate are hereby required to present the same, with proper vouchers, within four months after the date of first publication of this notice, as stated below, to the personal representative at: Mary E. Bunch, C/O Lynn Shepard, Attorney at Law, 66 Club Road, Suite 200, Eugene, Oregon 97401, or they may be barred. All persons whose

rights may be affected by the proceedings in this estate may obtain additional information from the records of the court, the personal representative or the attorney for the personal representative. Dated and first published: September 15, 2011. Lynn Shepard, OSB #80107, Of Attorneys for Personal Representative. Lynn Shepard, Attorney for Personal Representative, 66 Club Road, Suite 200, Eugene, Oregon 97401. (541) 485-3222. Email: shepard_law@yahoo.com

NOTICE IS GIVEN that the manufactured home located at 4475 Franklin Blvd., Space 15, Eugene, Oregon 97403, Plate No. X238174, Manufacturer ID No. 118232774, is deemed abandoned. The owner of the manufactured home is believed to be Robert John Donahue, and the occupant of the manufactured home is believed to be: None. The manufactured home will be sold by private bidding on September 28, 2011, with sealed bids to be submitted to and accepted by Cox & Associates, LLC, 142 West 8th Avenue, Eugene, Oregon 97401 Attn: Dean S. Kaufman, through September 26, 2011. To inspect the manufactured home, please contact Pamela Leavitt at (541) 554-4145.

IN THE CIRCUIT COURT OF THE STATE OF OREGON FOR THE COUNTY OF LANE In the Matter of the Estate of JAN JACOBUS MULLER, JR., Deceased. Case No. 50-11-18573 **NOTICE**

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