

## Production of Recommended Species of Ornamental Grasses

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I have always had a fascination with grasses. However, about 10 years ago this interest took a commercial turn as I saw a developing trend in grasses expanding into a profitable production item. *Miscanthus* and *Pennisetum* were among the first grass plants produced. There are hundreds of species and cultivars of ornamental grasses and grass-like plants and today we are growing about 45 different species and cultivars.

In the beginning we found, as with woody ornamentals that we were more familiar with, there was no one way to produce this wide diversity of plants. In general, we found that producing our liners in raised beds, 4 ft wide with a 6 in. × 6 in. spacing for smaller growing forms and 6 in. × 8 in. or 10 in. for larger growing forms, gave us nice clumps in a single growing season. We also found that by working with 1-year clumps we had a more vigorous plant than from second or third year plants. Beds are set up with overhead irrigation and watered on a regular basis as needed.

We have also found that all grasses do not want nor do they have to be propagated all at one time. When we first started with grasses we tried to do everything in that short window of time as grasses were coming out of dormancy in the spring. Today we still do a vast majority of division in the spring, especially with the *Miscanthus*, but we have found we can spread this project over many different seasons of the year depending on the genus. However, this created a problem in that we now had liners out of sink with our bed lining-out program that would normally take place in late May or early June.

We now pot all of our grass divisions in 2¼-rose pots with small types or 3-in. and 4-in. pots with larger types for root establishment before moving them to beds. The result is an established growing group of liners ready to be planted in beds at the same time whether from April divisions or from divisions made the past August or October and held over in minimum heat houses until ready for early summer planting. This has resulted in excellent stands in our beds. We also grow some species in containers for propagation and divide the overwintered containerized plants in the spring as we would those grown in beds.

We do not market grass liners but grow them for our own internal container production. We annually produce about 60,000 container-grown grasses. They are mostly grown in 2-gal containers, with smaller growing forms like *Carex* and *Festuca* in 1 gal and some of the larger growing forms in 3- or 5-gal containers as specimen size plants. Though we sell some plants to retailers most of our production is directed to the landscape trade or to the large wholesaler. We encourage contract growing for landscape projects and have produced as many as 23,500 2-gal containers of a single species for an individual project. We like grasses because they work well in our production system and can be grown in the same pine bark based container medium that we use for our other plants.