

Fact Sheet

Ornamental Grasses

For Wet Areas



Poorly drained and boggy areas of the garden need not be problem spots. With a little imagination and the right plants, such areas can become attractive areas of interest. There are many ornamental grasses that are well suited to dampish spots and even thrive in permanently wet areas. Stunning effects can be achieved by mass planting of one or two varieties and by contrasting different foliage colours and forms.

***Uncinia rubra* 'Red Hook Sedge'**

Native to New Zealand this attractive, small growing sedge is generally found in mountainous regions. Growing to approximately 35cm tall, *Uncinia* has long narrow leaves that are a distinctive dark red to bronze colour. Evergreen, they require a cool, moist area in the garden where they will thrive if their roots are kept cool. *Uncinia* is ideal for permanently damp areas of the garden and will do best in rich peaty soil that allows excess water to drain away. Grow in full sun or dappled shade. Contrasted with other foliage colours, *Uncinia* can make a stunning addition to any ornamental grass garden.

***Imperata cylindrica* 'Japanese Blood Grass'**

Native to the lowlands in Japan, China, Korea and Manchuria, *Imperata* grows in a range of conditions, but does best in moist, fertile soil in full sun or dappled shade. Although thriving in moist, well drained soil, *Imperata* can be drought tolerant once established. Growing to a height of approximately 50cm, *Imperata* spreads very slowly by shallow rhizomes. Leaves are erect and slender with the base of the plant being green and the tips red.



In summer the red increases and intensifies and by autumn the entire foliage is a vibrant and stunning blood red. In winter, *Imperata* loses its vibrancy and is best cut back to the ground. *Imperata* has been well known in Japan for the last century where it is often used as a companion plant in the shallow bonsai pots. *Imperata* also looks stunning in a mass planting, or as strong accent plants among other less vibrant foliage colours.

Deschampsia cespitosa 'Tufted Hair Grass'

Native to a wide area including Europe, Asia and North America, Deschampsia is an excellent specimen for permanently damp or wet areas. Deschampsia forms strict clumps with the basal tufts of foliage reaching a height of 60-90cm and spread of approximately 60cm. The foliage is evergreen, narrow and a rich dark green. Straw coloured flower panicles are produced in spring and summer and delicately rise above the green foliage. Doing best in compost rich, moist soil in sun or part shade, Deschampsia tolerates constantly wet roots and will thrive in boggy and heavy soils. Not suited to dry conditions at all, Deschampsia will be long lived in the right conditions. Making a stunning display whether mass planted or grown as single specimens, Deschampsia also makes a great contrast to the red foliage of Uncinia.

Phalaris arundinacea 'Picta' - Gardeners' Garters or Ribbon Grass

Native to both North America and Europe, 'Picta' is a popular variety of Phalaris and has been in cultivation since the Victorian era. Growing best in damp areas Phalaris will grow well beside ponds and will even tolerate shallow water. Will grow in full sun or part shade. Forming clumps of narrow soft foliage, with leaves reaching a height up to 1.5m tall. Foliage is an attractive green with distinctive cream stripes. Phalaris is superb when grown en masse and is easy to do so since it spreads by rhizomes. However, growth can be rapid and sometimes invasive and so Phalaris is well suited to pot culture, where it's spread can be contained.



Isolepis nodosa 'Knobby Club-Rush'

Native to most of the Southern Hemisphere, including Tasmania, Isolepis is an extremely hardy sedge, well suited to moist areas of the garden. Growing to approximately 1m tall, Isolepis forms a dense clump of erect, leafless, dark green glossy stems. Isolepis will grow in both full sun and part shade. Hardy and undemanding, it needs minimal care. Isolepis is an excellent specimen for coastal planting as it is very tolerant of both salt spray and water-logged or saline soil. Will grow in permanently wet soil, including the margins of a pond.

Libertia peregrinans 'Libertia'



Native to New Zealand Libertia is an unusual and striking plant. Belonging to the Iris family it is a perennial growing in tufts of narrow, erect waxy leaves that reach a height of about 75cm. Libertia spreads from underground rhizomes and is extremely hardy. Preferring moist soil, especially in summer, they will grow in full shade to full sun. The leaves of Libertia are a striking orange/copper brown colour and are contrasted with dainty white flowers in spring and summer.

Acorus gramineus - 'Variegatus' 'Sweet Flag'



Native to Japan, *Acorus gramineus* is a small growing perennial that thrives in permanently moist soil and can even be grown as a marginal or submerged water plant. This variety has soft, narrow, slightly curved leaves that are dark green with a cream centre. They reach a height of about 30cm and grow in flattened fans like those of irises, along short rhizomes. Both the leaves and rhizomes of *Acorus* are sweetly scented. Grown around pond margins, *Acorus* foliage will soften any harsh edges. *Acorus* would also make an attractive under planting to taller rushes and sedges such as *Isolepis* or *Restio*.

Other ornamental grasses, rushes and sedges, etc that are well suited to damp or wet areas of the garden include *Restio*, *Pontederia*, *Cyperus*, *Lythrum* and *Iris* varieties.

More information on these plants can be found in Stoneman's Fact Sheet - Water Plants # 1.

