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My suspicion that we in England's green and pleasant land are rather inclined to take greenness and grass for granted is well borne out by a recent experience of two friends of mine. Last April they were entertaining two visitors from Argentina. Anxious to show them something of England's beauty they duly motored the visitors about the glorious countryside of mid-Sussex. Never having seen anything like it before the Argentinians were speechless with enchantment, until finally one of them exclaimed: 'But why do you allow the cattle to eat the crops?' The particular crop the cattle were eating was, I need hardly say, grass.

Note that we always speak of grass in the singular, never the plural, no doubt thinking of it merely as that green stuff that has to be shorn down to below an inch on summer Saturday afternoons. But by doing so we ignore the fact that we have a whole legion of native grasses, many of them of enchanting grace and beauty, from the dainty totter-grass of meadows to the lordly, tall-as-corn ones that adorn dykes and road-sides.

I have a suspicion that more and more gardeners, possibly having their elbows jogged by the new race of flower-arrangers, are becoming increasingly interested in ornamental grasses. There are a lot of these and most of them are foolproof, some of them so foolproof that they can, if unchecked, become a confounded nuisance. I have clumps of one of these in my borders, always invoking rapturous admiration for its three-foot pink-and-gold variegations, so that I am always giving whole sheaves of it away. In spite of this we have to make, from time to time, positively furious onslaughts on it in order to preserve its bed-fellows from total strangulation.

The classical names of most of these grasses will, I fancy, have little or no meaning for the average gardener, who is very unlikely to have heard of *Tricholaena rosea*, *Hordeum Jubatum*, *Panicum violaceum* or upwards of 50 others obtainable commercially. I mention these three for the good reason that they are especially attractive. *Panicum violaceum* has wide, flag-like leaves and big tassel-heads of green and violet. *Tricholaena rosea* has silky spikes of wine-rose that turn a dark



Grasses Galore

Varieties of ornamental grass can add greatly to the interest of your garden, and flower-arranging, says H. E. Bates. And they grow so easily the only problem is how to get them to stop!

by H. E. Bates



maroon as they age. *Hordeum Jubatum* is feathery, greenish-grey and very graceful. All these provide a lot of charm from about July to the late autumn. Another favourite grass of mine is *Festuca ovina glauca*, which is barely six inches high and therefore admirably suited to the rock garden. Its thin, misty blue-grey spikes, making a sort of pin-cushion, are a delight.

This same misty to blue-grey effect is common to many of these ornamental grasses. *Agrostis nebulosa* bears a name that speaks for itself and has much the same cloud effect as *Gypsophila*. *Lagurus ovatus*, about a foot in height, has lovely silky fur-like heads. *Coix lacryma-jobi* doesn't need to spell out any further that it is Job's Tears, the tears being pea-like seeds, again of a soft pearly grey. *Pennisetum longistylum* is a half-hardy annual of a singularly twisted appearance, together with a soft plume of white or sometimes purple. The noblest grass of all and the best known, of course, is *Cortaderia argentea*, the Pampas Grass, which I always think needs a special and isolated situation to show off its striking beauty. Its common name comes, of course, from the fact that in its wild magnificence it graces the vast South American pampas.

Which brings me to another charming aspect of these grasses—their common names. How is this for a necklace of jewels? Cloud Grass, Animated Oats, Little Quaking Grass, Love Grass, Yellow Bristle Grass, Golden Grass. Many of these are either hardy or half-hardy annuals, though a good number are hardy perennials. Another nice thing about them is that nearly all of them may be dried for winter decoration, when they turn like the wheat and barley and many of them resemble, to soft autumnal shades of gold, and in doing so become the delight of flower arrangers. Probably some of them will also perform that same magical trick I used to do as a child with one of our native grasses. You gather a barley-like head and let it rest on your wrist and in no time at all, of its own volition, it creeps up your sleeve.

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In drawing (starting at top): Little Quaking Grass; *Festuca ovina glauca*; *Lagurus ovatus*; *Hordeum Jubatum*; *Cortaderia argentea* (Pampas Grass)