

Select Florida Native Grasses for North Central Florida – Fact Sheet #67

Master Gardener Gale Kempner

Muhly Grass (*Muhlenbergia capillaries*)

Few can live in the Gainesville area for long without becoming aware of Muhly Grass. It is famous for its mass plantings of fall color in Alachua County and elsewhere. Its foliage is an attractive green 3-4 feet tall most of the year but come August to November it blooms with feathery purple blooms. It is spectacular in group plantings. After it releases its seeds, the blooms turn light tan and are still attractive. It provides protection for small animals, including butterflies, and birds love the seeds. They may even use the stems for the nests.



In terms of care, little is required. It does require full sun. It is very drought and flood tolerant once established. It is also salt tolerant. It has few pests or diseases. It can be cut back in early spring to allow for new growth or just cut out the old leaves.

Fakahatchee Grass (*Tripsacum dactyloides*)

Fakahatchee Grass comes in two varieties, *Tripsacum dactyloides*, which is the regular form and *Tripsacum floridana*, which is the dwarf variety. The main difference is height. The regular variety grows 4-6 feet high and the dwarf grows 2-4 feet high. Both can fill a space 4-6 feet wide. It is a beautiful dark green in color with stiff leaves, many of which stand straight up, creating a fanning effect. While it does bloom in summer, the flowers are not showy and it is grown mainly for its foliage. In the wild it grows mainly in swampy moist areas but tolerates drought fairly well once established. It can die back to the ground in an extremely cold winter but mostly stays evergreen. It also tolerates standing water. It is a host plant for the Byssus Skipper butterfly. This grass requires little care except that dead leaves should be removed in late winter or early spring. This can be somewhat hazardous as the leaves are sharp and protective clothing should be worn.



Elliott's Lovegrass (*Eragrostis elliottii*)

Elliott's Lovegrass is a beautiful fall blooming grass that grows about 2-3 feet tall. It blooms late summer to fall. The foliage is green but the flowers are an inflorescent white to tan that seem to sparkle. They like full sun to very light shade and like dry, well drained soil. They are extremely easy to care for and require little or no maintenance once established. Birds are attracted by their seeds.



Purple Lovegrass (*Eragrostis spectabilis*)

Purple Lovegrass is very similar to Elliott's Lovegrass except that the color of the flower is a magnificent reddish-purple. They are especially striking in groups. Size, care and maintenance are similar to Elliott's Lovegrass. They are susceptible to deer feeding.



River Oats (*Chasmanthium latifolium*)

This is a much less well-known grass but is included because it grows in the shade. Its flowers look like oats, hence its name. The oats are originally white but turn brown after setting seed and are still very attractive. They are fast growing up to five feet in height but can be cut back to about 2 feet to restrict growth without harming it. In nature it grows in moist environments but can become invasive if given too much moisture. They will tolerate dry conditions and not become invasive. Birds like the seeds and it is a host plant for the Gemmed Satyr butterfly.

