

## Caring for Ornamental Grasses

Do you have any ornamental grasses around your home? Ornamental grasses add great interest to your landscape throughout all the seasons.

Ornamental grasses come in all different sizes, colors and forms. Whether you choose a grass that stands up straight, like Little Bluestem, or you want something with a nice arching habit, like Fountain Grass, the texture that grasses provide and the sound of the grass blowing with a warm summer breeze make ornamental grasses a great addition to any landscape. They also provide excellent habitat for insects and wildlife, so they truly can be loved by everyone!

One of the greatest benefits of ornamental grasses is that they provide great winter interest when the rest of your annuals and perennials have died back to the ground. While you can cut back your ornamental grasses at the end of the growing season, leaving them standing through winter can be quite beautiful and is also much appreciated by wildlife, such as birds who will eat the seeds and find shelter in them.

Ornamental grasses are pretty low maintenance, but if you left your ornamental grasses standing for winter now is the time to do a little spring cleanup to prepare them for a new growing season. Cut the foliage back to about 4-6 inches above ground before the new growth begins. This will help initiate spring growth earlier than if you don't cut it back.

The other thing you can do in spring is divide your grass clump if necessary. Ornamental grasses don't always need to be divided, but if the center of the plant has died out in the last season, it is time to divide your plant. You can also divide your plant if it has gotten too large for your space, but you should only do this every few years.

Divide ornamental grasses after you have cut it back – this will make it much easier! Dig out around the entire root ball of the grass. Work gradually around it to lift it out in one big mass if possible; large clumps might need to be taken out in sections. Once the root ball is out of the ground, use a sharp spade or knife to cut the root ball into sections. Discard any dead sections and transplant the rest. Make sure to provide the new transplants with plenty of water through the growing season to insure they develop a good root system.

Ornamental grasses are a wonderful addition to the home landscape. If you need some ideas, check out the Ornamental Grass Garden the next time you're at Klehm! It is situated near where the East Loop meets the West Loop.

Additional Resources:

Chicago Botanic Garden - [https://www.chicagobotanic.org/plantinfo/grasses\\_ornamental](https://www.chicagobotanic.org/plantinfo/grasses_ornamental)

University of Illinois Extension - <https://web.extension.illinois.edu/grasses/>