



NORTH AMERICAN  
NATIVE PLANT SOCIETY

*Dedicated to the study,  
conservation, cultivation,  
and restoration  
of North America's  
native flora*

Easy-to-grow  
Native Grasses  
Eastern North America

The grass family, *Gramineae*, is one of the largest and most widespread families of flowering plants — yes, *flowering* plants — in the world. The grass family has the third largest number of species globally, after the Orchid and Daisy families (*Orchidaceae* and *Compositae* respectively).

Grass flowers are so tiny you may never have noticed them. In fact, grasses have evolved without colourful or scented sepals and petals to attract pollinators. They rely on wind pollination. Each tiny flower is enclosed in a bract, which looks like a scale. The flowers are clustered together in a spike.

Along with one-quarter of all flowering plants, grasses are monocotyledons. This means they sprout with one seed leaf or cotyledon and the leaves have parallel veins.

Grasses are distinctive because they continue to grow after being cut. Growth arises from the base up, like a fingernail, rather than unfolding from the bud. This is an adaptation to grazing. They have jointed stems and a complex but subtle flower structure.

The stems are hollow except at the point where the leaf is attached. Look closely at the stem and you will notice that most are round.

Grasses evolved during the Cenozoic era, 65 million years ago, and today can be found worldwide in all types of ecosystems. In fact, they are the most numerous plant type found in Arctic regions.

Far from boring, grasses offer colour, texture, form and winter interest to a garden.

In the fall, some grasses turn colours such as bronze and burgundy, and they make a terrific contrast to other flowering plants.

Most grasses require very little water or maintenance.

After planting grasses in your garden and seeing them dance in the wind, you'll wonder why you waited so long to add them to your little bit of nature.

### Easy-to-Grow Grasses for Eastern North America

#### Small to Medium-Sized Grasses

Sweetgrass  
*Hierochloa odorata*

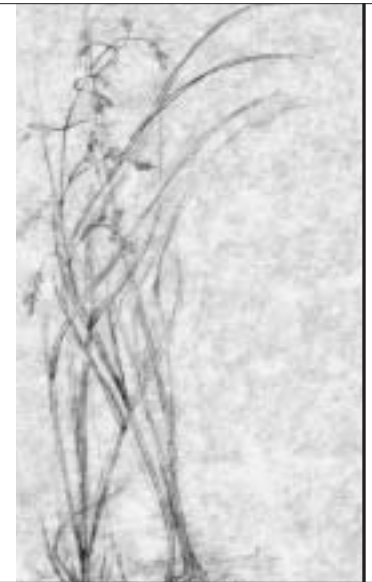


ILLUSTRATION BY ELLEN MELVILLE

#### Sweetgrass *Hierochloa odorata*

**Native habitat:**

Moist meadows, shores and bog margins.

**Garden Conditions:**

Grows in partial to full sun in wet to moist soil, sand or loam.

**Form and Flower:**

Flowers appear in the spring and are bell-shaped and arching. The attractive clusters are shiny tan, bronze or purple. The leaves become very fragrant when dried and are used by North American First Nations in religious ceremonies. Sweetgrass grows up to 60 cm (2 ft) in height and can spread vigorously by rhizomes.

**Range:** Circumboreal, south to New Jersey, west to Arizona.