

Grasses, Rushes and Sedges, Oh My!
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If low maintenance plants are what you are looking for, take a look at *Poaceae* (True grasses), *Juncaceae* (Rushes) and *Cyperaceae* (Sedges). These plants bring texture, color, motion and if you are standing nearby, a bit of a swooshing sound: something to tickle almost all the senses. It is a good idea to plant before the end of September, so if you are in the mood to add a touch of interest to your garden requiring little long term effort, try grasses, rushes or sedges.

Ornamental grasses range in size from 6 inches to 14 feet. There are cool and warm season grasses, clump forming grasses (neat mounds) and rhizome forming grasses (running, often invasive). Remember the wise saying, 'right plant, right place?' Understanding a plant's growth habit is also extremely wise. Keep the moisture level even in the beginning to encourage a good root system. Mulching the first winter is suggested. After that, there is but one day of maintenance per year that is needed with ornamental grasses: cut back after winter passes and before they break dormancy (late February or early March depending on the weather).

In the family Rush, there are 8 *genera* and 400 species. Most likely to be of interest to the gardener are the true rushes (*Juncus*) and the wood rushes (*Luzula*). The *Juncus* with their cylindrical pointed leaves are fond of wet, boggy environments. The *Luzulas* on the other hand with their flat arching leaves, prefer dry, woody places. Cutting back is not necessary for rushes.

Sedges are grown for foliage effect in borders, rock gardens, containers, etc. The solid stems of the sedges are three-sided, long and narrow. Although considered evergreen perennials, many types of sedge are short lived (2-3 years). Sedges should not be trimmed back. If the tips brown, give them a slight trim, not a harsh crew cut like ornamental grasses.

September is a good time to add a layer of low maintenance interest to your gardens. Ornamental grasses, sedges and rushes provide color, texture, size and linear shape. Survey your gardens, do a little homework and as a reward, your senses will surely sing.