Missanthus sinensis ‘Zebrinus’

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Introduction

This cultivar has distinctive yellow strips across the foliage displaying a variegated effect (Fig. 1). Leaves droop and weep toward the ground as do many of the other cultivars. Slender leaves originate in a clump, spreading out and up like a fountain. The 5 to 7-foot-tall clumps bear pink flowers in a one-sided inflorescence in late summer and fall which can be used for drying or as a dye plant. Their pinkish or silvery 8- to 10-inch-long plumes persist into the winter. Foliage is flexible and blows easily in the wind. This shrub-like grass turns to a rich gold in the fall; the fall color lasts through the winter.

General Information

Scientific name: Miscanthus sinensis ‘Zebrinus’  
Pronunciation: miss-KANTH-us sye-NEN-sis  
Common name(s): ‘Zebrinus’ Japanese Silver Grass, Zebra Grass, Banded Miscanthus  
Family: Gramineae  
Plant type: herbaceous; ornamental grass  
USDA hardiness zones: 5 through 9 (Fig. 2)  
Planting month for zone 7: year round  
Planting month for zone 8: year round  
Planting month for zone 9: year round  
Origin: not native to North America  
Uses: mass planting; border; container or above-ground planter; screen; accent  
Availability: generally available in many areas within its hardiness range

Description

Height: 6 to 7 feet  
Spread: 5 to 10 feet  
Plant habit: round; weeping  
Plant density: moderate  
Growth rate: fast  
Texture: fine
MISCANTHUS SINENSIS ‘ZEBRINUS’ -- ‘ZEBRINUS’ JAPANESE SILVER GRASS

Foliage

Leaf arrangement: alternate
Leaf type: simple
Leaf margin: serrate
Leaf shape: lanceolate
Leaf venation: parallel
Leaf type and persistence: deciduous
Leaf blade length: more than 36 inches
Leaf color: variegated
Fall color: brown or tan
Fall characteristic: showy

Flower

Flower color: pink
Flower characteristic: summer flowering; fall flowering

Fruit

Fruit shape: no fruit
Fruit length: no fruit
Fruit cover: no fruit
Fruit color: no fruit

Fruit characteristic: no fruit

Trunk and Branches

Trunk/bark/branches: typically multi-trunked or clumping stems
Current year stem/twig color: not applicable
Current year stem/twig thickness: not applicable

Culture

Light requirement: plant grows in full sun
Soil tolerances: occasionally wet; acidic; sand; loam; clay; slightly alkaline
Drought tolerance: moderate
Soil salt tolerances: poor
Plant spacing: 36 to 60 inches

Figure 2. Shaded area represents potential planting range.
Other

Roots: not applicable  
Winter interest: plant has winter interest due to unusual form, nice persistent fruits, showy winter trunk, or winter flowers  
Outstanding plant: plant has outstanding ornamental features and could be planted more  
Invasive potential: aggressive, spreading plant  
Pest resistance: no serious pests are normally seen on the plant

Use and Management

Zebra Grass is frequently used in the landscape as a specimen or screen. It is also employed in group plantings forming a nice mass of fine-textured foliage. Use Zebra Grass as an accent or mass planted in a large-scale landscape, such as around a commercial building to add a touch of soft elegance and texture. The slightest breeze moves the foliage allowing the landscape to ‘come alive’. Many people prefer to cut the grass back to the ground in the spring so new green growth is not covered with last year’s dried, brown foliage.

Zebra Grass requires a location in the landscape that receives full sun, but it is adaptable to most well-drained soils. This ornamental grass is quite drought tolerant. Miscanthus sinensis is a warm season grass and transplants best in the spring. Provide good drainage at the planting site.

Other cultivars include: ‘Condensatus’, coarser leaf texture than species, mid-summer bloom, 7 to 8 feet tall; ‘Gracillimus’, narrower leaves than species, fall bloom, upright growth habit from 5 to 8 feet tall; ‘Purpureascens’, reddish foliage in summer, purple-red foliage in fall, silver pink inflorescence, mid-summer bloom, 4 to 5 feet tall; ‘Silver Feather’, silvery white flowers in August; ‘Strictus’, horizontal yellow bands on foliage, upright growth habit, 6 to 8 feet tall; ‘Yaku Jima’, more compact, 3 to 4 feet tall.

The propagation of Miscanthus sinensis is by division in the spring.

Pests and Diseases

No pests or diseases are of major concern. Rust diseases occasionally infest the foliage but it often goes away in drier weather.