Introduction

Fountain Grass is an ornamental grass that is used in the landscape for its fine-textured foliage and showy flowers. Some catalogues refer to the plant as Pennisetum rupelli. The leaves of this 3- to 4-foot-tall plant are narrow, curving, linear blades with a beautiful light green cast. The light purple-pink colored inflorescence of Fountain Grass sits atop a hollow, 3-foot-long, nodding flower stalk. Flowers appear almost white in bright light. The feathery inflorescence is 12 inches long and occurs from early summer to frost. The fruits of this grass are small seeds that volunteer to form small plantlets nearby; this plant is considered mildly invasive if planted near undisturbed natural areas. The invasive habit is likely to be much less a problem in an urban landscape.

General Information

Scientific name: Pennisetum setaceum
Pronunciation: pen-niss-SEE-tum set-TAY-see-um
Common name(s): Fountain Grass, Tender Fountain Grass
Family: Gramineae
Plant type: ornamental grass; herbaceous
USDA hardiness zones: 8 through 10 (Fig. 1)
Planting month for zone 8: year round
Planting month for zone 9: year round
Planting month for zone 10: year round
Origin: not native to North America
Uses: mass planting; container or above-ground planter; accent; border; cut flowers
Availability: generally available in many areas within its hardiness range

Description

Height: 4 to 6 feet
Spread: 2 to 4 feet
Plant habit: upright
Plant density: moderate
Growth rate: fast
Texture: fine

Foliage

Leaf arrangement: most emerge from the soil, usually without a stem
Leaf type: simple
Leaf margin: entire
Leaf shape: linear
Leaf venation: parallel
Leaf type and persistence: deciduous
Leaf blade length: 18 to 36 inches
Leaf color: green
Fall color: brown or tan
Fall characteristic: showy

Flower

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

Fruit

Fruit shape: unknown
Fruit length: unknown

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**Fountain Grass**

**Fruit**
- **Fruit cover:** unknown
- **Fruit color:** unknown
- **Fruit characteristic:** inconspicuous and not showy

**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:** acidic; slightly alkaline; sand; loam; clay
- **Drought tolerance:** moderate
- **Soil salt tolerances:** unknown
- **Plant spacing:** 36 to 60 inches

**Other**
- **Roots:** not applicable
- **Winter interest:** no special winter interest
- **Outstanding plant:** plant has outstanding ornamental features and could be planted more
- **Invasive potential:** potentially invasive
- **Pest resistance:** no serious pests are normally seen on the plant

**Use and Management**

Fountain Grass is a valuable accent or specimen plant that may be used around a fountain for the cooling silhouette it presents. This plant is also lovely when planted in mass, and it makes a nice accent in a border. Flowers can be cut for fresh arrangements but they fall apart as they dry making them unsuited for dry arrangements.

Fountain Grass should be planted on a well-drained site that is exposed to full sun. Plants grow poorly in the partial shade and droop over. This grass is grown as a perennial in most of Florida (zones 8 through 10) but is an annual in cooler climates. Foliage will die back in north Florida in winter, but

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**Figure 1.** Shaded area represents potential planting range.
will reappear in spring if the winter is mild. It is only moderately drought tolerant.

The cultivar ‘Rubrum’, also known as ‘Cupreum’, has reddish foliage and flowers. ‘Rubrum Dwarf’ grows 2 1/2- to 3-feet-tall.

**Pests and Diseases**

No pests or diseases are of major concern.