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How To Cut Ornamental Grasses

by Lydia Holley

Grasses are a very popular addition to gardens. They add colorful plumes in the autumn and add attractive winter interest with faded seedheads. They sway in the wind, giving movement and life to a dormant garden.

Their popularity is also partly due to their low maintenance requirements. Many ornamental grasses only need to be sheared back in early spring. But there is a catch - some do not.



There are two types of grasses - deciduous and evergreen. You need to determine which type or types of grass you have in your garden. This determines how you will treat your grasses when you go to cut them back.

For instance, pink muhly grass is an evergreen. You will treat evergreen grasses differently than deciduous grasses. Not sure which one you have? Do not worry. You will not need to have a list of grasses to determine if your grass is evergreen or deciduous. You just have to look at it closely.

Deciduous grasses are mostly brown all the way to the bottom. It may have new green growth that comes from the bottom. Evergreen grasses, on the other hand, have green all the way up to the top of the stems. There may be some brown inside the grasses, but they are not all brown all the way to the bottom.

Let us go over deciduous grasses first, because this is how most people see grasses being cut back - all over, at the bottom.

When you decide to cut back your deciduous grasses, it is helpful to have some twine available. Tie the grass stems together in the middle. This look will be reminiscent of a wheat sheaf. Cut a few inches above the ground, taking care not to cut any new green stems that are growing from the bottom. You want a few inches of the stems above ground in order to make certain you did not cut the crown.

Evergreen grasses, however, do not need to be cut back. To get rid of the dead foliage throughout the grass, take your hands, fingers spread, and comb your fingers up and through the grass. This will pull the dead stems out, leaving behind the green stems.

It is best to wear gloves and long sleeves when either cutting your deciduous grasses or when combing through your evergreen grasses since some grasses can have sharp edges which can cut your skin.

For more information, call 903-675-6130, email hendersonCMGA@gmail.com or visit www.henderson-co-tx-mg.org.