

KENTUCKY'S LEAST WANTED PLANT 2005

Promoting alternatives to invasive landscape plants

To heighten awareness of invasive plants that threaten Kentucky's native biodiversity, a **Least Wanted** plant will be featured in the Spring of each year with suggested alternatives.

LEAST WANTED!

Chinese Silver Grass

Miscanthus sinensis

Miscanthus is a tall ornamental grass that grows in clumps and has feathery seed tops. Its long, slender, arching leaves and stems make it popular as a landscaping plant. However, the feathery seeds can blow great distances and become established in thin, disturbed soil, especially along road-sides, in power line rights-of-way, and along forest margins in the southeast and mid-Atlantic states. Once established, it can grow aggressively and out-compete native grasses and wildflowers.



Good Alternatives

Miscanthus x giganteus or *Miscanthus 'Purpurascens'*

Not all *Miscanthus* species are invasive. These hybrid forms, *Miscanthus x giganteus* or *Miscanthus 'Purpurascens'*, have infertile seeds which rarely reproduce. They have the same height and structure as *M. sinensis* and are attractive alternatives. *M. 'Purpurascens'* leaves turn a beautiful red-orange in the fall, and *M. giganteus* has yellow fall color.



Miscanthus sinensis var. *gracillimus*

This is another noninvasive, sterile form with nearly the same height as the invasive species. The leaves reach up to 6 feet and flower spikes reach up to 8 feet. Leaves on this variety are narrow, less than 1/4 inch and green. Flower spikes are a shimmering silvery-red and fade to silvery. Dead foliage turns tan and will remain in place all winter. Plant with room to expand as plants will form large clumps.

Good Native Alternatives

Switch grass

Panicum virgatum

Also known as tall panic grass, this is a tall warm season, vigorous perennial native to Kentucky. It has green blades as leaves, with a reddish tint. Blades can be up to five feet tall. Panicles of small reddish flowers are borne on the ends of long stems from June to August. In the fall, switch grass blades turn pale yellow and the seeds on the panicles turn beige. Switch grass grows best in full sun and in wet-moist soils. Switch grass is best used in the back border of a perennial bed or in a wildflower meadow. Birds and small mammals use switch grass as a



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Indian grass

Sorghastrum nutans

This grass is a warm season perennial bunch grass native to Kentucky. It grows from 3-7 feet in height. Indian grass has long, flat, and narrow leaf blades that become yellowish bronze in the fall. Dense and bronze-yellow flowers occur in narrow, oblong panicles in August and September. It has yellow spikelets (seed heads) that have white hairs, which make it look gold and silver in the sunlight. Indian grass grows best in full sun and is fairly tolerant to drought conditions. It is best used in the back border of a perennial bed or in a wildflower meadow. Indian grass is a host plant for skipper butterflies. Birds and small mammals eat the seeds.



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