

# Lavant Horticultural Society

## 'Great Companions: Ornamental Grasses & Excellent Perennials'

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*Marina runs Phoenix Perennial Plants, a nursery near Alton supplying unusual plants to some of the top designers for their gardens at Chelsea Flower Show that have won 'Best in Show' on several occasions. After the excellent talk on Late Summer Flowers that Marina gave at our September 2022 meeting in 2022, we were not disappointed – an enjoyable evening with lots of useful information. Again, Marina brought lots of the plants to show us, rather than just relying on images.*

*Grasses make up about 20% of the planet's earthmass and, being wind pollinated, are not reliant of pollinators. Marina not only took us through a wide range of grasses and their possible uses in the garden, but also covered herbaceous perennials and other plants that mix well with them*

### Grasses:

#### Spring

**Melica uniflora albida** – white millet: small white flowers, grows well in dappled shade. Clump forming, can be divided. Underplant with species bulbs, e.g. crocus, cyclamen, winter aconite, snowdrops.

**Seslerias** short blue-green leaves with small blue-green flowers

**Sesleria heufleriana**

**Stipa tenuissima** if it gets if it gets wet it falls over.

**Stipa lessingiana**, however, stands up even when wet and looks almost identical.

**Stipa barbata** has sharp barb at tip. Provided low ground cover in white garden at Sissinghurst.

**Hordeum jubatum** - can be a pest; considered a weed in North America.

**Molinia** – good for clay soils.

**Molinia caerulea ssp arundinacea** – taller, but surprisingly needs less water than our native *Molinia caerulea* (Purple moor grass). In autumn their green stems turn yellow – looks good with asters or in low sunlight. Deciduous – by Christmas stems will break off at base, no need to cut down.

**Panicum** grasses of N America –open, quite clumpy but still see through.

**Miscanthus**. Most M. get quite tall, 5-10 ft. Can put on this growth in 3-4 months. Not see-through.

There are smaller ones, e.g. '*Little Kitten*', but these are always buff, whereas some of the others have red in them. Good to provide movement to the border.

If you want red, *Miscanthus 'Rotfuchs'* is a good choice.

Some *Miscanthus* have foliage that reliably goes red: '*Ghana*', '*China*' and '*Africa*'.

**Panicums** - although they are still clumpy they are much more see-through.

Can get colour in *Panicums*, e.g. the green-blue of '*North Wind*', '*Blue Tower*', but these flower quite late and the first frost will just turn them yellow.

Can get **Pennisetums** with red foliage, but they are not hardy.

There are some other grasses that are red, such as **Imperatas** and **Setarias**, but they also are not hardy.

**Calamagrostis 'Karl Foerster'** – one of the best tall grasses, looking good for most of the year. Cut down in February; from June will have pink, green and purple in its flowers. That is over now, but it will stay upright throughout the winter.

**Deschampsia**

**Hakonachloe** - pretty flowers. Also foliage gives good movement.

### Herbaceous perennials:

Seedheads amongst grasses – **silphium**.

#### **Asters (*Symphotrichum*):**

**Michaelmas daisies:** '*Prairie Purple*' bred from '*Little Carlow*' but has mahogany-coloured stems.  
'*Superstar*'.

**Novae-angliae asters:** foliage dies off as they flower – grasses can cover up bare or unsightly stems.

**Aster '*Monte Cassino*'** – masses of tiny white flowers – excellent for pollinators.

**Kniphofia** *Rooperi* – very late flowering red-hot poker– goes well with *Molinia*.

**Solidago** (Golden Rod): two North American worthy of mention:

*S. speciosa* – largest flowers;

*S. rugosa* '*Firework*'.

**Teasel** family very important at this time of year – all the **scabious**, **knautias**.

**Persicaria** (now renamed **Bistorta**) – good source of nectar.

Once flowers are over, they drop, leaving space for new ones, so always look fresh.