

LIVE FREE AND DIG

Grasses

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As we plan our gardens for 2026, success is foremost in our thoughts. I don't know how many of you saw the movie at the Colonial last year, "Five Seasons: The Gardens of Piet Oudolf." If not, you may have visited the High Line in New York City, which he designed. Piet Oudolf is a Dutch landscape architect, known for using bold drifts of grasses and herbaceous perennials. My husband has wanted grasses in our garden for years. When we lived in Virginia, we planted pampas grass, a big mistake, since it is invasive and is hard to remove. Not to worry, I don't think it can survive in New Hampshire.

The beauty of Oudolf's plantings inspires my adventure with grasses once again. When we moved to

New Hampshire, I was attracted by the idea of Island planting. And created two large islands which have matured over the past fifteen years, but drive our mowing crew crazy. So, this spring, they will become one large Island with grasses in between. Last summer, we installed paths along the edges of the existing islands. to have access to the existing plants. Now, for the grasses, we chose six different grasses from Everwilde Farms.

The grasses range from 12 to 80 inches tall, and are chosen for their height, color, and relationships with one another. We think of grass as green in summer and brown in winter. The fact is that each of our grasses has its own description.

Big Bluestem at 80-inch changes from green in spring to blue-green during summer and becomes a

deep red-bronze in the fall. Indian Grass at 72 inches forms upright blue-green clumps, and sets seeds that are gold in the fall. The grass provides food, nesting areas, and protection from predators. Canada Wild Rye at 48 inches is bright green (including seeds) during summer and turns tan in fall. The seeds resemble oat seeds and weigh the stems over, providing food for birds and small animals. Little Bluestem only reaches 30 inches, and is valued for its blue-green color, which turns brown, copper, and crimson after the first frost. The grass produces fluffy white seed pods that must be removed to avoid spreading.

The two shortest grasses are very different. June grass is 24 inches, pale green and feathery, that turns gold in the fall. This grass was dried and

used by American Indians to make brooms, brushes, and ornaments. Blue-eyed grass is not a true grass, but a forb and its leaves are flat blades about 12-15 inches high with blue-purple flowers with yellow centers. They will make an interesting border.

As an experiment with grasses, who knows how it will succeed? The plan is to plant bands of grasses, from short to the tallest, in the center. What will make a difference is the water required for each of the grasses and keeping the seeds from overpowering a neighbor, so they will need attention.

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