



**Sandhills**  
Horticultural Gardens

# The Bloomin' News

Sandhills Community College

Vol. 11, No. 4

Winter 2016

*The Sandhills Horticultural Society - dedicated to the support of the Sandhills Horticultural Gardens since 1987.*

## Ornamental Grasses and Their Uses in the Garden

Jim Westmen

What is an ornamental grass? This label broadly covers the true grasses and grass-like plants that are used for ornamental purposes. There exist over 7000 species of grasses from those grasses that historically feed the world to those we incorporate in our landscapes.

The many benefits of grasses in the garden are due to their horticultural and physical characteristics. Those characteristics include, size and form, textures, color, growth habit, and site location preferences.

Their wide range of sizes from a few inches to over twenty-five feet in height allow them to fit almost every landscape design criteria. Using a rather tall grass such as *Miscanthus giganteus* (Giant Chinese Silver Grass); a ten to twelve foot screen can be accomplished rather well. This screen may be seasonal with an annual pruning to the ground in late winter/early spring. As the season continues and the grass grows the buffer will change from three to four feet to six to eight feet and then to ten to twelve feet by late July or August.

Plant forms, although somewhat similar, range from very vertical to arching and weeping forms. The physical movement with the wind blowing adds to the visual interest and the sound of the foliage rustling can help mask other unwanted noises. Grasses seem to always be changing in the landscape and are rarely stagnant throughout the year. Different types of grasses work well together and give a pleasing mix of heights, textures and colors. Many other combinations with evergreens like hollies, junipers, and chamaecyparis really can create dramatic contrast.

Grass textures (both visual and tactile) range from course to fine and rough to smooth or soft. Grasses offer that loose and flowing feeling with visually soft thin foliage as well as those with course and wide (corn-like) textured appearance. Many grasses make you want to reach out and touch them to feel that soft and smooth foliage like the prairie drop seed grass (*Sporobolus heterolepis*). Be careful though many are not soft to the touch and are serrated on the leaf margins and may cause small cuts to your skin if

handled the wrong way such as pampas grass (*Cotaderia selloana*) and many miscanthus varieties. The seed heads or plumes that adorn the tops of many grasses near the end of the season are also a wonderful source of texture and interest that will last through the winter months. Probably one of the best additional features grasses offer.

The wide range of colors available in ornamental grasses is another reason these plants are widely incorporated into today's landscapes. Colors from all shades of green to bronze and purples are available with grasses. The variegated varieties either striped lengthwise or banded across the leaf blade add a striking contrast in the garden and easily demand your attention. Many grasses also offer a fall season color change that attracts additional attention at that time of year.

The different growth habits of spreading and creeping types to bunch and clumping forms add to the diversity of uses in the garden. They can be used as ground covers, large masses as well as small groupings or as an accent plant within a group of other plant types.

While most grasses fit into a sunny site rather than a shady one, there are still those that can be used in shaded woodland settings nicely. You will find that most grasses prefer a full sun environment and will include the broadest range of sizes available. The grasses that tolerate or prefer shade of a woodland setting are smaller in stature, such as most sedges and northern sea oats (*Chasmanthium latifolium*).

Their adaptation to many soil types and dry or wet site conditions are also reasons to use ornamental grasses for solutions to these sometimes difficult design criteria. They can serve to reduce erosion and hold slopes as well as slow down and reduce storm water runoff that can endanger streams and water quality.

The use of outdoor lighting highlighting grasses will add another level of enjoyment and dramatic impact for the evening landscape.

Think outside the box for screen and accent plants. If you are thinking low maintenance and care for your landscape, ornamental grasses work well. Hopefully when that next design project comes around you will include these very versatile plants in your landscape.

Book suggestions:

- The Color Encyclopedia of Ornamental Grasses, Author: Rick Darke
- Ornamental Grasses, Better Homes And Gardens, Step-By-Step Successful Gardening, Author: Peter Loewer



*Muhlenbergia capillaris*



# First Greeter at the Ball Visitors Center

Fred Garrett



*"I am so grateful to the SSC Landscape Gardening faculty, staff and students for implementing and maintaining these beautiful gardens. What an asset to the community! Appreciation goes to those in the community who have been so supportive in many different ways."*

Sue Williamson

If you have ever been to the G. Victor and Margaret Ball Garden Visitors Center on either a Monday or Friday you probably have met a lady by the name of Sue Williamson. Sue has been a faithful greeter in the reception center since January 2000. In fact she asked if she could be considered as a volunteer for the center prior to completion of the building in 1999.

Sue grew up on a small farm in Columbus County, North Carolina with four older brothers. After completion of grade school she earned a BS degree in Science from East Carolina University and afterwards a Masters of Art in Teaching from the University of Chapel Hill followed by a Masters of Art in Chemistry Teaching from Loyola in New Orleans. In 1967 she won a scholarship sponsored by the Corning Glassware Foundation to study abroad. All of her graduate work was

accomplished with stipends granted by the National Science Foundation. Later she was involved in additional graduate studies at California State at Fullerton, the University of California at Berkeley, Duke in Durham, North Carolina, and in 1977 was awarded a two and one half month science study tour of Europe sponsored by Southern Illinois University.

The first 18 years of her professional life was spent teaching in the North Carolina public school system. The last four years was spent teaching

chemistry at Pinecrest High School. In 1973 Sue was employed by Sandhills Community College to teach chemistry. She attributes the 25 years of employment at Sandhills as "the best working years of my career" working with Dr. Avery Dennis and all of the faculty in the Science Department.

She held membership in the American Chemical Society and the two year College Chemistry Committee; served on the Ruth Pauley Lecture Series Board at Sandhills Community College for 18 years and was made an Honorary Member about eight years ago; served on the Sandhills Horticultural Society Board for one term; is a member of Alpha Delta Kappa Sorority for women educators and has held all major offices in the local chapter; has served all major offices in the local branch of the American Association of University Women; and continues to be an active member in The Church of Wide Fellowship having served as deacon, assistant financial secretary, and archivist. When asked about her hobbies, as if she needed more to do, she quickly lists cooking, needlework, reading, and travel. When you ask former members of the Science Department at Sandhills to comment on Sue you hear such comments as "A very gracious lady who was dedicated to helping students reach their potential and was always available to help students from early morning to late afternoon."

When you asked Sue to sum up her volunteer work as a greeter at the G. Victor and Margaret Ball Garden Visitors Center she will tell you that she has looked forward to working there every week meeting local people, many from other states and countries. A round of applause for Sue for all she has done and continues to do for others.

The Gardens are always looking for new volunteers as greeters and docents. If you would like to become one and enjoy some of the experiences that Sue has had, please contact Dee Johnson at 910.695.3883 or email at johnsond@sandhills.edu. Training is offered and you can volunteer as much or as little as you wish. Come and join us!

# Preparing Your Garden for Spring Vegetable Planting

Johanna Westmen

Some of my favorite garden vegetables are from the spring planting here in the Sandhills region. Lettuces, radishes, carrots and peas come to mind when I think of spring vegetables. There are many more vegetables that can thrive in your spring garden with just a little bit of planning and preparation.

If you planted your vegetable garden this fall with some type of cover crop you will need to till it under about the first week in January. This will give your garden time to break down some of the plant material before you actually begin planting. If you did not plant a cover crop, you can go ahead and till or turn over your garden now. If you have done a soil test on your garden you have a general idea of the pH of your soil and you can use this opportunity to put some lime out, if needed. Most of the native soil in our region has a relatively low pH. Even without a soil test you can rest assured that some application of lime will be needed if none has been made recently. Even though it can take as much as three to six months for the lime to react, this application of lime can adjust your pH for future plantings. If you are tilling your garden to prepare for planting this is the time to add any amendments such as compost. Depending upon the type of soil you have, organic matter can be added to help increase nutrient retention and water retention.

Once you have tilled, limed and added amendments you are ready to begin thinking about the design of your garden. The design is going to be determined by the type of vegetables you want to plant. If you plan to grow garden peas you will need some type of structure for them to twine and grow on. There are varieties that can be grown as bush type. Be sure to look for them when ordering if your garden is not big enough to support some type of structure. Planting seed crops such as carrots and radishes will require you to prepare a seed bed that is relatively smooth and debris free so these small seeds will germinate without difficulty. Other crops such as lettuces and broccoli can be purchased as small plants and will not be as particular as those of seeded crops.

There are many wonderful spring vegetable crops that we can grow here in the Sandhills. Ones that I have grown successfully in the past are potatoes, peas, carrots, radishes, lettuce, onions, kale, spinach, cabbage and kohlrabi. Others (that I have not been too successful with) are beets, cauliflower and rutabaga. That doesn't mean you can't grow them here - it means I need advice from those of you that have been successful! So, please, send me your secrets and I will be glad to share mine with you as well.

Happy gardening!

# Horticultural Society Events & Workshops

*Dolores Muller*

We offered the last Lunch and Learn program of 2016 in August. Bruce Fensley talked about growing fall and winter vegetables. The Lunch and Learn series has been a great success and we will continue them in 2017 starting again in April. They are the fourth Monday of the month from 12 noon to 1pm. Plan on attending next year as we will have new and exciting topics and speakers.

In August we had a workshop on making cement leaf bird baths. Pat Banville was the instructor with the help of Peggy Hudson. The class was so popular we had a waiting list of people we could not accommodate so we hope to offer it again next summer. On a fabulous sunny September day we had the first ever Plein Air Painting in the Gardens. It was a huge success with many artists participating and a crowd of people stopping by to watch the artists at work creating beautiful art in the gardens. Those attending enjoyed an array of goodies and refreshments served throughout the day in the Ball Visitors Center.

In October we were fortunate to have Brent Heath of Brent and Becky Bulbs come to give two workshops and a lecture at the Owens auditorium. These were part of the Sandhills Council of Garden Clubs and Sandhills Horticultural Society Lecture Series presented twice a year. Workshop participants took home containers with tulips, daffodils, hyacinths, muscari and anemone which they planted. The bulbs were especially chosen for our area to create a living flower arrangement of blooms for next spring.

November workshops included Norma Burns' workshop on Growing and Using Ginger and Sueson Vess teaching us how to make Delightful Desserts. Both workshops included preparation demonstrations, a tasting and recipes. We will end the year with a holiday flower arranging workshop by Maggie Smith of Maggie's Farm. Hers is always a popular workshop. Participants create beautiful arrangements to take home for the holiday season.

Wishing you Peace on Earth, a Merry Christmas and may your Holidays be Happy....



*Kathy Leuck, artist*

## Upcoming Events...

Register by email or call Tricia Mabe at 910-695-3882

### **Maggie Smith Christmas Flower Arranging**

**December 8 (Thursday) 10AM to Noon – Ball Visitors Center**

Maggie Smith of Maggie's Farm designs will conduct a workshop in which participants will make a holiday floral arrangement to take home for the Christmas holiday.

Horticultural Society members \$35, non-members \$40. Payment due at registration. Space is limited to 24.

### **Pruning Workshop**

**January 28 (Saturday) 10AM to Noon – Ball Visitors Center**

Moore County Extension Agent Taylor Williams will conduct this workshop. Learn pruning basics then go outside for a demonstration on how it is done. FREE but reservations are necessary.

Email: [landscapegardening@sandhills.edu](mailto:landscapegardening@sandhills.edu) or call 910-695-3882

### **Children's Art Competition and Exhibit**

**February 4th – 11th – Ball Visitors Center**

Sponsored by the Sandhills Horticultural Society, five area schools will compete and exhibit art work that interprets nature. **Sunday, February 5 at 2PM** – the awards ceremony for the winning school will be presented. Refreshments will be served from 1PM to 4PM.

### **Matt Whittiker – Green Haven Plant Farm**

**February 23 (Thursday) 10AM**

Matt will conduct a special tour and talk covering his hydroponic lettuce growing facility at Green Haven Plant Farm in Carthage. His hydroponic lettuce is sold at Fresh Market and other grocery stores. Everyone will receive a head of hydroponic lettuce.

Meet at Green Haven at 10AM. Take 15-501 toward Carthage. Turn right on Rt.22. Drive ¼ mile, turn left onto Green Haven Lane. A sign is at the road.

Horticultural Society Members \$15, non-members \$20. Payment due at registration.



## In Memoriam

The Sandhills Horticultural Gardens and the Landscape Gardening Program lost a wonderful volunteer and supporter in May. Mary Jane Knight had served multiple terms on the Board of the Sandhills Horticultural Gardens and had established a scholarship for landscape gardening students in honor of her son David. She was an active docent leading tours in the gardens. We will miss her bright smile and her unending support.



Sandhills Community College  
3395 Airport Road  
Pinehurst, NC 28374  
[www.sandhills.edu](http://www.sandhills.edu)

NON-PROFIT ORG.  
U.S. POSTAGE  
**PAID**  
PERMIT NO. 55  
PINEHURST, NC

## Consider a Charitable Bequest

Donors who make bequests to the Sandhills Horticultural Society provide critical and lasting support for the Gardens. A gift ensures our living collections to thrive and continue to grow. One of the easiest ways to give a planned gift is in your will. Bequests can be unrestricted to use where the need is greatest. If you are considering a restricted gift, we would appreciate the opportunity to discuss your ideas. Whether you think of yourself as rich or poor, your gift makes a difference.

**For additional information, call Dee Johnson at 910-695-3883.**

