

Mexican Feather Grass - *Stipa nassella*

Ornamental grasses provide texture, contrast, and interest in the landscape. The Mexican feather grass is one of the best ornamental grasses, for a variety of reasons. It is a delicate, fine-textured grass that grows in a dense, fountain-like clump. The leaves are rolled tightly inward, giving the appearance of a wire or needle, hence the other common name: Texas needle grass. The flower, or inflorescence, is a golden soft panicle approximately six to twelve inches tall above the leaves. These long flower spikes add to the attraction and vibrancy of this grass.

Mexican feather grass requires full sun to partial shade for best establishment. The bed should be fertile and well-drained. Do not plant the crown too deep or use heavy mulch because it will decline and rot. In its native habitat, the grass grows on rocky slopes and dry open woods and prairies. Mexican feather grass will often stay green through the winter, and often goes dormant in the heat of summer, depending on location. It is classified as a cool-season grass, because it will grow during the winter, however this grass is unlike any of the other ornamental grasses because it can remain viable all year long. The grass blooms in early summer with a greenish flower cluster, which persists well into fall turning golden brown.



This grass is virtually pest and disease free. Before planting, remove any competing vegetation, especially aggressive Bermuda, which inevitably will become intermingled in the middle of the grass clump. Plant at the same depth as they are growing in the container, with the crown slightly above the soil profile. Cut back in early to mid-February before much new growth has occurred, then side-dress with 2-1-1 fertilizer and again mid-summer. Keeping these grasses watered regularly (not overwatered!) in the summer makes for healthier plants in the fall and winter.

Use the Mexican feather grass in mass plantings, drifts, or clumps in rock gardens, or as an accent with bolder textured plantings. Space grasses 12 to 18 inches apart. The Mexican feather grass is outstanding when backlit by the sun or even landscape lighting. Blooming grasses add another quality to the landscape—movement. The slightest breeze will cause the grass to draw attention and appeal. Good companion grasses are muhly, purple fountain grass. Other perennials such as rudbeckia, purple cone flower, salvias, columbine, or oxeye daisies provide contrast and color.

One drawback to the Mexican feather grass is its tendency to self-sow and may spread out of the designated bed. So it is best to plant them where this trait is not a problem. Propagation is from seed. Large, established plants can be divided, but this process is usually not successful.