



Shenandoah Switch Grass

Panicum virgatum 'Shenandoah'

The Grass Family (Poaceae)

Zones: 5-9

Sun Requirement

Moderate Water

Location: Floral Walk

Have you ever heard the soft whisperings of a tall grass in the evening breeze? Or watched its leaves glow in the warm light of the setting sun? If you haven't tried ornamental grasses, let the beauty of Shenandoah Switch Grass convince you of its place in the garden. Ornamental grasses add texture, movement and structure to any garden throughout the entire year.

Switch Grass, *Panicum virgatum*, is a native of North America. Once a major component of the great American tall-grass prairie, Switch Grass can be found in gardens in one of its many cultivated forms. It is a warm-season grass, beginning growth in late spring, flourishing and flowering in the heat of summer, and going dormant in the fall. It has upright, narrow leaves and grows in clumps.

The cultivar 'Shenandoah' is a beautiful variety with dark green leaves tipped with red. It flowers in the summer, producing red-tinted, airy panicles that eventually turn tan and persist into the fall. The leaves develop more dark red tones as the summer progresses and are completely wine-colored by autumn. Both the leaves and inflorescences are beautiful with backlighting from the morning or evening sun. Even in winter it will provide interest, since the dry, straw-colored leaves remain upright if not flattened by heavy snows. It grows to a height of 4 to 5 feet.

Shenandoah Switch Grass can be used in almost any design, as a specimen plant or in masses, for screening, at the edge of a pond, or in a large container. It does well in most soils, including clay, and is drought-tolerant once established. It grows best in full sun. In fact, too much shade and water will cause it to flop over. The only maintenance it requires is cutting it back in late winter or early spring, and dividing it in spring when it gets too big.