Gunsmoke Switch Grass

Panicum virgatum 'Gunsmoke'



Gunsmoke Switch Grass in bloom
Photo courtesy of NetPS Plant Finder

Height: 4 feet

Spread: 4 feet

Sunlight: ○ ◐

Hardiness Zone: 3b

Description:

This mid-sized selection forms an upright clump of striking, blue-green leaves; airy heads of pale pink flowers appear on plumes in late summer, maturing to tan seed heads; plumes are very large and showy; perfect as an accent or massed in borders

Ornamental Features

Gunsmoke Switch Grass features airy plumes of shell pink flowers rising above the foliage in late summer. Its attractive grassy leaves are bluish-green in colour with hints of steel blue. As an added bonus, the foliage turns gorgeous shades of crimson and in the fall. The tan seed heads are carried on showy plumes displayed in abundance from late summer to mid winter. The tan stems can be quite attractive.

Landscape Attributes

Gunsmoke Switch Grass is an herbaceous perennial grass with an upright spreading habit of growth. Its relatively fine texture sets it apart from other garden plants with less refined foliage.

This is a relatively low maintenance plant, and is best cut back to the ground in late winter before active growth resumes. It has no significant negative characteristics.

Gunsmoke Switch Grass is recommended for the following landscape applications;

- Accent
- Mass Planting
- General Garden Use
- Container Planting

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Planting & Growing

Gunsmoke Switch Grass will grow to be about 4 feet tall at maturity, with a spread of 4 feet. It tends to be leggy, with a typical clearance of 1 foot from the ground, and should be underplanted with lower-growing perennials. It grows at a medium rate, and under ideal conditions can be expected to live for approximately 15 years. As an herbaceous perennial, this plant will usually die back to the crown each winter, and will regrow from the base each spring. Be careful not to disturb the crown in late winter when it may not be readily seen!

This plant does best in full sun to partial shade. It is very adaptable to both dry and moist locations, and should do just fine under typical garden conditions. It is considered to be drought-tolerant, and thus makes an ideal choice for a low-water garden or xeriscape application. It is not particular as to soil type, but has a definite preference for alkaline soils, and is able to handle environmental salt. It is somewhat tolerant of urban pollution. This is a selection of a native North American species. It can be propagated by division; however, as a cultivated variety, be aware that it may be subject to certain restrictions or prohibitions on propagation.

Gunsmoke Switch Grass is a fine choice for the garden, but it is also a good selection for planting in outdoor pots and containers. With its upright habit of growth, it is best suited for use as a 'thriller' in the 'spiller-thriller-filler' container combination; plant it near the center of the pot, surrounded by smaller plants and those that spill over the edges. It is even sizeable enough that it can be grown alone in a suitable container. Note that when growing plants in outdoor containers and baskets, they may require more frequent waterings than they would in the yard or garden.