

## ***Pennisetum setaceum* Tender Fountain Grass<sup>1</sup>**

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### **Introduction**

Fountain grass is an ornamental grass that is used in the landscape for its fine-textured foliage and showy flowers. Some catalogues refer to the plant as *Pennisetum rupelii*. The leaves of this 3- to 4-foot-tall plant are narrow, curving, linear blades with a beautiful light green cast. The light purple to pink colored inflorescence of fountain grass sits atop a hollow, 3-foot-long, nodding flower stalk. Flowers appear almost white in bright light. The feathery inflorescence is 12 inches long and occurs from early summer to frost. The fruits of this grass are small seeds that volunteer to form small plantlets nearby; this plant is considered mildly invasive if planted near undisturbed natural areas. The invasive habit is likely to be much less a problem in an urban landscape.

### **General Information**

**Scientific name:** *Pennisetum setaceum*

**Pronunciation:** pen-niss-SEE-tum set-TAY-see-um

**Common name(s):** fountain grass, tender fountain grass

**Family:** *Gramineae*

**Plant type:** ornamental grass; herbaceous

**USDA hardiness zones:** 8 through 10 (Fig. 1)

**Planting month for zone 8:** year round

**Planting month for zone 9:** year round

**Planting month for zone 10 :** year round

**Origin:** not native to North America

**Uses:** mass planting; container or above-ground planter; accent; border; cut flowers

**Availability:** generally available in many areas within its hardiness range

### **Description**

**Height:** 4 to 6 feet

**Spread:** 2 to 4 feet

**Plant habit:** upright

**Plant density:** moderate

1. This document is FPS463, one of a series of the Environmental Horticulture Department, Florida Cooperative Extension Service, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida. Original publication date October, 1999. Reviewed June, 2007. Visit the EDIS Web Site at <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu>.
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**Figure 1.** Shaded area represents potential planting range.

**Growth rate:** fast

**Texture:** fine

**Foliage**

**Leaf arrangement:** most emerge from the soil, usually without a stem

**Leaf type:** simple

**Leaf margin:** entire

**Leaf shape:** linear

**Leaf venation:** parallel

**Leaf type and persistence:** deciduous

**Leaf blade length:** 18 to 36 inches

**Leaf color:** green

**Fall color:** brown or tan

**Fall characteristic:** showy

**Flower**

**Flower color:** white

**Flower characteristic:** summer flowering; fall flowering

**Fruit**

**Fruit shape:** unknown

**Fruit length:** unknown

**Fruit cover:** unknown

**Fruit color:** unknown

**Fruit characteristic:** inconspicuous and not showy

**Trunk and Branches**

**Trunk/bark/branches:** typically multi-trunked or clumping stems

**Current year stem/twig color:** not applicable

**Current year stem/twig thickness:** not applicable

**Culture**

**Light requirement:** plant grows in full sun

**Soil tolerances:** acidic; slightly alkaline; sand; loam; clay;

**Drought tolerance:** moderate

**Soil salt tolerances:** unknown

**Plant spacing:** 36 to 60 inches

### **Other**

**Roots:** not applicable

**Winter interest:** no special winter interest

**Outstanding plant:** plant has outstanding ornamental features and could be planted more

**Invasive potential:** potentially invasive

**Pest resistance:** no serious pests are normally seen on the plant

### **Use and Management**

Fountain grass is a valuable accent or specimen plant that may be used around a fountain for the cooling silhouette it presents. This plant is also lovely when planted in mass, and it makes a nice accent in a border. Flowers can be cut for fresh arrangements but they fall apart as they dry making them unsuited for dry arrangements.

Fountain grass should be planted on a well-drained site that is exposed to full sun. Plants grow poorly in the partial shade and droop over. This grass is grown as a perennial in most of Florida (zones 8 through 10) but is an annual in cooler climates. Foliage will die back in north Florida in winter, but will reappear in spring if the winter is mild. It is only moderately drought tolerant.

The cultivar 'Rubrum', also known as 'Cupreum', has reddish foliage and flowers. 'Rubrum Dwarf' grows 2 1/2 to 3 feet tall.

### **Pests and Diseases**

No pests or diseases are of major concern.