



TORONTO MASTER GARDENER

INVASIVE PLANTS FACT SHEETS

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MISCANTHUS

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MISCANTHUS

(Miscanthus sinensis)

WHAT IS MISCANTHUS

Miscanthus, also known as maiden grass, eulalia, Chinese silver grass and zebra grass is among the most popular perennial ornamental grasses with its wide range of leaf colours, striking flower plumes and winter interest. Miscanthus is native to Asia and was first introduced to the eastern United States in the late 1800's.

WHY IS MISCANTHUS A PROBLEM

The species plant has escaped cultivation and has naturalized across eastern North America where it occurs most often in human altered sites such as roadsides, ditches, along railroad

tracks and at abandoned home sites. It has occasionally been found to spread through woodlands and forest clearings. Miscanthus crowds out native plants and creates shade that keeps native plant seedlings from getting established. Its leaf litter decomposes slowly, which delays the return of nutrients to the soil.

ARE THE CULTIVARS INVASIVE

More than 100 cultivars of miscanthus have been introduced into the horticultural market. While the species plant is widely recognized as being invasive, there is less consensus about the invasive potential of cultivars. Some sources report that cultivars can be grown in home gardens without risk of escaping into natural areas. Caution is needed! Cultivars have a wide range of fertility as shown on the following table.

Table One: Some Toronto locally available *M. sinensis* cultivars ranked by seed set

Cultivar	Reproduction rank of 31 cultivars tested (1=most 31=least) ²
<i>M. sinensis</i> 'Dixieland'	27/31
<i>M. sinensis</i> 'Huron Sunrise'	8/31
<i>M. sinensis</i> 'Morning Light'	25/31
<i>M. sinensis</i> 'Purpurascens'	16/31
<i>M. sinensis</i> 'Zebrinus'	15/31

If you are thinking about including miscanthus in your garden, you should consider the following:

- The amount of seed produced varies among the cultivars. Some cultivars create a lot of viable seed.
- Some new cultivars have been bred with a goal of producing less seed, and several sterile cultivars have been produced, (My Fair Maiden, Bandwidth, Scout), although they are not yet readily available in Ontario (Spring 2021). Asking your local nursery for these plants will encourage them to stock these sterile cultivars!
- Cultivars with striped or banded leaves set little or no seed, particularly when only one miscanthus is grown in a garden (consider Zebrinus or Variegatus).



Photo: Helen Battersby

- Cultivars that are late blooming may be less able to create seed during our growing season.
- Even if you have chosen cultivars with low seed production, these plants can cross pollinate and the offspring can have very different characteristics, so may produce more seed and be more fertile.
- Miscanthus is “self-incompatible” meaning that it cannot self-pollinate. One plant grown in isolation will not produce seed, so you might consider growing only one plant in your garden. You should also be aware of what nearby neighbours are growing!
- Check your garden frequently for any seedlings and remove them.
- While seed is the main way miscanthus is disbursed, plants can sprout from rhizomes. When digging a plant out, be careful that rhizome fragments are not distributed which could start new plants.

IDENTIFICATION

Miscanthus is a clumping, warm season grass. Plants are 1-2 meters tall with leaves 30-60 cm long and about 1 cm wide. The stems and leaves are upwards arching, giving it a rounded fountainlike form. Flowers appear in the fall and persist through the winter.

MANAGEMENT FOR THE TORONTO GARDENER

Do not plant species miscanthus or fertile varieties. New seedlings and shallow-rooted plants can be pulled out, after loosening the soil with a garden fork. Larger plants should be dug out. It is important to dig out the entire root system, otherwise re-sprouting can result. Plants should be disposed of in the garbage (landfill).

If you see **miscanthus** or other invasive species in the wild, please contact the Invading Species Hotline at 1-800-563-7711, or visit [EDDMapS Ontario](http://EDDMapS.Ontario) to report a sighting.

ALTERNATIVE GRASSES TO CONSIDER

There are several native clumping grasses to consider as an alternative to miscanthus, including:



BIG BLUESTEM
(*Andropogon gerardii*)
(1m – 2.5m tall)



LITTLE BLUESTEM
(*Schizachyrium scoparium*)
(0.5m – 1m tall)



SWITCH GRASS
(*Panicum virgatum*)
(1m – 2m tall)

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PHOTO CREDIT

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