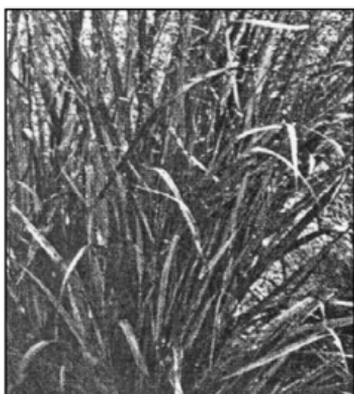


# PLANT CORNER

Welcome to another year of the Plant Corner, a series of profiles of STAR PERFORMERS among perennial garden plants from the folks at Chaska Farm & Garden.



## 'Cheyenne Sky' Switchgrass

*Panicum Virgatum* 'Cheyenne Sky'

Maybe we should all become more familiar with the switchgrasses. Though they will never have the fame of corn they may become the new biomass source of ethanol. Until then we can learn to love them in our prairies and perennial gardens.

Now grasses may be a hard sell to some gardeners, especially if you prefer large and bright-colored flowers to fill your beds. Grasses tend to provide texture and subtle long-season beauty.

So much recommends switchgrasses; they are native, hardy, tough and tolerant. They work in a natural or prairie setting and fit just as well into a formal garden bed being clean tidy clumping grasses, not invasive spreaders. This means they stay put and look predictably much the same year after year.

The latest breeding renditions of switchgrass get us to varieties with red leaf-blades, something until now only available in annual grasses like Purple Fountain Grass.

'Cheyenne Sky' is the latest offering, turning wine-red in early summer before the airy seed-heads show. Standing only about 3 ft. tall and forming a tight vase-shaped clump, both the size and shape make this plant very useful as a mid-to-background garden element, while the colorful foliage puts color there.

Plant switchgrasses in most any soil in good sun. They require little care. They are warm-season grasses which has them out of ground in late spring and producing seed-heads late in summer. Winter display is coppery-tan and stands up well, a nice added bonus. I have also cut them dried for use inside, they stand up well to that as well.

I go back time and again to plants like switchgrasses that are easy, long-lived, neat and predictable. Oh, and the color thing.

— Tom

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