

Splendor in the Grass

Written by Alice Massey

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When the brilliant, clear blue October sky is reflected in the Lowcountry waters and the sun is lighting up the rich colors of fall blooming plants, you know autumn is finally here to stay. The sluggishness of summer is gone and I am ready to get out and dig again.

Plant of the Month should certainly be the Muhly Grass; officially known as *Muhlenbergia capillaris* and locally known as Sweet Grass, it's striking in full bloom. A number of texts list this plant as *Muhlenbergia filipes* which some botanists consider the species; others consider them identical. Whatever its name, this plant is stunning. This grass belongs to the vast Poaceae (grass) family and the genus name refers to the early botanist Henry Ernest Muhlenberg, an ordained a minister whose family is credited with bringing Lutheranism to the USA.

The Foamy pink inflorescences are not true flowers but very fine panicles of rosy pink seed heads which almost light up when the sun catches them. Although not seen as often, there are also varieties with snow white plumes which make a stunning show when planted en masse. Can you picture mounds of fluffy snow – in Beaufort? Native to the sea islands of the southeastern coast, these wild grasses make outstanding landscape plants and are now being featured in gardens throughout the southeast and even some high end nurseries on the west coast have started growing them.

The very slim, erect, blue green foliage will hold its color until winter when it goes

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