

"Just Add Water"

Articles and Photos by Soni Forsman

Ornamental rice, decorative plant for wet places

Dwarf black madras grass (*Oryza sativa*) is another of the gratis plants I received last spring. It is an annual ornamental rice grass with a dense fountain-like shape.

The upright, pointed foliage attains a height of 16 to 20 inches. The foliage breaks ground greenish bronze in color but quickly deepens to shades of burgundy-purple. By mid-summer, the flowers that produce the fruit/grain appear on branch-like spikes. In early fall, the spikelets heavy with the maturing grain arch over. It requires only sun and consistently moist soil.

This purple grass is multi-purpose – a singular specimen plant, mass plantings around a water garden and a strong contrasting color against a backdrop of green-foliaged plants. Additionally, this ornamental rice can also be used in the perennial/annual garden or in a mixed container of annuals if its basic requirements are met.

Dwarf black madras grass is a tropical perennial, hardy in zones 9-11. Even in those zones, it is generally considered an annual and grown each year from new seeds.

On arrival this grass was a root-bound plug with tattered foliage. I teased out the roots and planted it a one-gallon nursery pot and sat it in a bowl of water in the sun. It quickly became an attractive grass soon garnished with flowers that produced the grain. The colorful foliage and plant size would have been enough to make me consider growing it again. But, the mid-summer flowers and the ripened seeds that followed in the fall, makes that a definite. Its continually changing look added interest all growing season.



Late spring/early summer - Dwarf black madras grass (*Oryza sativa*) contrasts with green-foliaged plants in a container water garden.



Mid summer - Ornamental rice with flowers



Early fall- Spikelets arch under the weight of the maturing grain