



Bear Creek Press

'Falling Mythsteries'

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Mystical Muhly Grass— A plant profile

One of the most beautiful fall blooming ornamental grasses is also one of the easiest to grow. Muhly grass (*Muhlenbergia capillaris*) is a native of the Southern United States and is identified by very narrow grass blades. This is a soft grass, lacking the sharp edges that are typical of many grasses. For this reason Muhly is suitable for planting in areas where you might brush against the gentle blades; near pathways, on terraces, in pots, or in the kitchen or family room.

Muhly forms a handsome mound of foliage, about 2 feet tall by 3 feet wide. Saving its show for September, Muhly erupts in mystical clouds of light purple flowers and lasts for 4-6 weeks. This light and airy effect looks great on a single plant and fantastic in a group planting. A little sunlight behind the flowers makes it look electric. It can also be a beautiful addition to a cut flower arrangement, adding a soft hint of purple with an airy dimension that can't be matched.

Hits & Myths in the Game of Gardening

Myths and misconceptions in gardening are about as common as weeds. This is not surprising, as new methods of gardening and the "latest fads" are introduced at an amazing rate. Well documented research and trials in real life situations also change the way we think and respond to problems. So what should we believe? Who should we listen to?

I tend to place my faith in the well researched trials continuously conducted by local professionals and universities. By testing, observing and comparing results over and over, consistent results outweigh opinion. Many times new approaches prove that commonly accepted practices are not always the best approach.

Here are a few commonly repeated myths and how recent research tends to contradict what we used to think:

Myth: Spring is the best time to plant trees and shrubs. It turns out that fall is a better time to plant most trees and shrubs. Even as the sap retreats and leaves fall, a tree is still growing. Warm soil temperatures in the fall encourage new roots to develop. Furthermore, there is less transplant shock when a plant is dormant. A new tree or shrub has a much longer time to adjust before the most stressful time of year- the heat and drought of summer.

Myth: Since it is raining, I don't need to water new plantings. A newly installed tree or shrub is solely dependent on our watering skills to survive. While frequent rains are beneficially, even a heavy rainfall rarely will provide enough water to a new plant. Consider that a two inches of rain or water from an irrigation sprinkler will soak into the ground about two or four inches. Most new plants' roots are eight to twelve (or more) inches in the ground. Only a thorough soaking at the base of a new plant will insure enough water will reach the entire root system.

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Yummy Compost

For years we have searched for a suitable organic amendment for topsoil and gardens. There have been few acceptable choices and all of them have had their own undesirable personalities.

One of the worst choices, mushroom compost, was clearly mis-named. Fresh horse manure was labeled "compost" and after a quick stop at the mushroom farm it was shipped to nurseries. It is so fresh that if you listen closely you can still hear the horses chewing oats. Even when mixed with soil, it has a tendency to burn roots and attract flies.

Municipal compost is another alternative. A noble effort to recycle sewer sludge and tree and yard waste, it also has some drawbacks. Even after composting, a large amount of the finished product is wood chips. We are scared to use it in the vegetable garden because of the potential for harsh cleaning compounds and metals in the finished product.

Peat moss seems to be an ideal amendment and is great combined with the local topsoil. However, we can't help but feel guilty about using up the bogs of Canada to enhance our garden soil. In addition, shipping the product across the U.S. leaves a carbon footprint about the size of Texas.

Finally, there may be an acceptable alternative to enhance the garden. This newly available amendment consists of well composted wood chips and composted and fresh rice hulls. This black, loamy compost is clean, drains quickly and mixes easily with local soils.

This lovely mix has several desirable characteristics. It is a well composted amendment with high organic content and small particles. The wood chips and carbonized rice hulls are well composted and combined with fresh rice hulls, which help increase the air pockets in the finished soil. This will make the new root systems of your plants healthy and happy.

Best of all, the ingredients are locally produced by-products of Arkansas agriculture. So while improving the organic content and tilth of our soil, we can be pleased that we are having a smaller impact on the other gardens of the world.

This yummy compost is now available at The Bear in bulk. Call to arrange the best time to pick it up or to have some delivered. We also now have a garden soil available- a well blended compost/topsoil mix that is perfect for all your garden beds and landscape projects.

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More Hits and Myths

Myth: I only need to water a new planting the first summer. A new planting will take several years to develop roots into the surrounding soil. It is usually suggested to hand water for three years after planting a new tree or shrub. Keep an eye on extended dry spells to determine watering schedules after this initial adjustment period.

Myth: New trees need to be staked. A new tree with a healthy, adequate (meaning large enough) root system usually does not require staking. It is better for the health of the tree, and the strength of the trunk, to allow some movement of the trunk. A root system that is large enough should anchor the new planting. Make sure the roots are extensive enough to support the size of tree.

Myth: Paper tree wrap is the best way to protect a tree trunk. Recent research shows that it is best to allow an air space between the bark and any protective device used on a trunk. Paper or plastic tree wrap can hold moisture against tree bark and encourage fungus or insects. A better approach is to use a cage or protection that allows air movement around the bark. Tar or dressing on a wound or cut has also been shown to hold moisture and is now being discouraged.

Myth: Weed barrier will stop weeds. We have seen many types of weed barriers used in older landscapes. They all have one thing in common: they don't stop weeds. Perennial weeds like dandelions, bermuda grass and

johnson grass will grow right through a weed barrier. The seed from annual weeds will settle and grow on top of the barrier. Some plastic barriers slow or prevent water from percolating through the soil. We still use weed barrier under gravel, but avoid it in most other cases. A healthy layer of mulch and timely care is still the best way to discourage weeds.

If yesterday's "facts" are today's myths, what is a gardener to do? We can only imagine the confusion this causes for an experienced plantsperson, much less someone starting on a hobby of gardening or landscaping. Please don't be afraid to badger the folks at the garden center to see how the latest garden news will affect your project.

Fall Hours ~ Tuesday-Saturday 9:00 ~5:00

Fall Checklist

- ☑ Improve your soil with compost or amendments.
- ☑ Transplant and divide spring flowering perennials
- ☑ Remove and burn leaves that show signs of fungus
- ☑ Add color with mums, pansies, snapdragons and flowering cabbage
- ☑ Add showy & deer resistant ornamental grasses

Enjoy a glorious fall!

Fall Sales

- ☞ October 10-31– All trees and shrubs 20% off
- ☞ October 12-20– Garage & Garden Sale, select Terra Cotta & Pottery 50%-70% off. Nice Housewares & Kitchen Goodies also on Sale
- ☞ October 16-27– Ornamental Grass Sale, all three gallon containers 20% off



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