

Chionochloa rubra - Growing Guide

Growing Chionochloa Rubra

Red tussock grass

Chionochloa rubra is an RHS Award of Garden Merit plant and an increasingly popular ornamental grass with our customers. The implication of the AGM is that it is easy to grow in most situations in UK gardens although it is in fact a native grass from New Zealand.

This is an evergreen perennial and clump forming grass which mixes well in a border and grows about 3-4ft in height when mature. It is a key feature plant in a massive new border (2019) at Wakehurst Place and we think it grows exceptionally well with Iris and Kniphofia to mention just a couple of the many possibilities.

Chionochloa rubra is one of the most graceful of evergreen grasses with an attractive spreading habit. It has thin coppery leaves which move in the wind and is mainly admired for the colour of the leaves which have also a metallic golden tan and coppery-red colouring nearer the base of the clump. In winter the leaves are more beige at the tips with more pronounced coppery tones at the base.

This is also a long lived grass which seldom has any dead foliage around the plant. The flower spikes have lax panicles of spikelets in summer. These can be cut back to the base in autumn to tidy the plant up. Otherwise, and unlike several other ornamental grasses, we do not usually give C. rubra a 'haircut' in the spring.

C. rubra is not fussy about pH but grows best in reasonably moist soils and will grow much smaller in dry condition overlaying chalk or clay. It hates being waterlogged in the winter which is why you often see it performing best at the top of a slope or bank.

Propagation is simple by division of clumps in the spring with a spade or knife but the seeds are very easy to germinate. This grass grows in the wild in large expanding self-sown clumps and, given time and the right conditions, it will do the same in your garden.



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