

## Cortaderia - Growing Guide

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*Pampas grass, Tussock grass*

Few water or lakeside plantings do not feature a clump or two of pampas grass. They can naturalise themselves in adjacent woodlands; here a good half mile from the water as their seeds are carried away by strong winds to germinate in the open. On the lake at Caerhays the clumps have become so congested on the islands that the only solution is a box of matches in the autumn on the lower dead leaves. The periodic conflagrations do not kill established plants but they can certainly slow down the rates of growth and make these huge vigorous plants rather more manageable. The leaves can certainly give you a nasty cut if you get too close.

*C. sellowiana* originates, as you would expect, from the South American pampas regions. Individual clumps can readily, over time, grow to 8-10ft in height with a spread of at least 5ft. Individual arching leaves can be 6-8ft long in an established clump. The flower spikes appear in late summer and, when mature, will tower over the clump in profusion. Individual spikes are silky and silvery at first, turning white when the individual female spikelets in the panicle of flowers become ripe.



Cortaderia by the lake

I appear to have described a grass which is something of a garden thug. While it is true that *C. sellowiana* should only be grown in a natural or wild setting (where there is plenty of room) and probably not in a more formal herbaceous border that is not to say that perhaps cultivars of a more manageable size, with more attractive features, should not be grown as 'architectural' plants in more choice locations.

*C. sellowiana* 'Gold Band' has gorgeous yellow margined leaves which age to golden yellow. This plant is slightly less hardy and you may find that all the foliage dies off completely on young plants over winter. Clean them up and they will reshoot after looking a bit unsightly at first.

*C. sellowiana* 'Pumila' is a more dwarf forming growing to about 5ft in height eventually with a smaller spread.

*C. sellowiana* 'Rendatleri' is a tall growing form with attractive pink panicles of flowers rather than the conventional white.

*C. sellowiana* 'Sunningdale Silver' is another tall growing form with silvery foliage and large white flowers.

*C. richardii* originates from New Zealand, is slightly less hardy than *C. sellowiana*, and not quite as large and vigorous. However its flower spikes appear rather earlier in mid-summer and last well on into autumn. *C. richardii* is also a vigorous clump forming species with blue-green leaves.

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