

PURPLE MUHLY

DESCRIPTION

Purple muhly (*Muhlenbergia capillaris*) is a perennial, warm-season bunching grass that is native to Louisiana and central and eastern United States, blooming in late summer to fall. It was named for Gotthilf Henry Ernest Muhlenberg (1753-1815), a self-taught botanist. It prefers well-drained sandy

soils but can grow in a range of soils, including clay or rocky soil, and has a fibrous clumping root system. Flowers are pink to purple, and flower spikes grow 2 to 5 feet in height.



IDENTIFICATION

Purple muhly is a fine-textured grass with an upright bunching habit and is semi-evergreen. It has an alternate leaf arrangement. The leaves are basal and dark green in the spring, turning to an almost copper color in the fall. It is a showy grass with long, curving, glabrous and glossy

leaves with entire leaf margins that roll inward to a wiry point at the tip. Seed heads are composed of panicles with purple flowers that fade to pink in the fall. The fruits are brown and not showy. Purple muhly can be established very quickly, in as little as one to two weeks from seed.



Above: Purple muhly in bloom in October.

Far Left: Grouping of purple muhly at Goodwood Library Independence Botanical Gardens in Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

Left: Purple muhly floret closeup. Photos by Jennifer Blanchard

GROWING CONDITIONS



SOIL TYPE:

Grows best in sandy soils yet can be found growing in many types of soil and can tolerate drought and infrequent flooding.



SOIL PH:

Prefers a slightly acidic to neutral soil between 5.5 and 7.0 pH. Always follow soil test recommendations to achieve desired soil pH.



LIGHT:

Prefers full sun to partial shade.



GROWTH RATE:

Establishes quickly from seed or division.



TIP: Before amending the soil, consider testing your soil at the [LSU AgCenter Soil Testing and Plant Analysis Laboratory](#) or contact your local extension office for more information.

PURPLE MUHLY

MAINTENANCE REQUIREMENTS

Muhly grass makes a good selection in the landscape because it requires little to no maintenance. You may want to remove the dead vegetation from time to time. However, it is recommended to leave the biomass in the fall and over winter to provide a habitat for insects and

small animals. Cutting back or grooming of the plant is best done in the spring, when you can cut the clump completely back to the ground, allowing new growth to replace it.



FERTILIZATION:

Muhly grass is a native plant that does not require fertilization. However, if plants are not establishing well or soil nutrients are poor, you may add an organic plant food/fertilizer in early spring or late winter. Follow soil test recommendations for proper fertility.



IRRIGATION:

Naturally occurring rainfall may provide sufficient water for maintaining a healthy plant in normal years. The plant is drought tolerant, but if you see symptoms of extreme stress, you may water as needed.

ESTABLISHMENT METHODS

Establishment of muhly grass can be achieved through planting live plants or germination of seed and transplanting bunches.

transplanted in the fall with 24- to 48-inch spacing and will generally establish within one to two weeks.

Seeds can be collected after flowering late fall into November. It is recommended to use a comb to collect the seeds. Native grass seed should be sown, or plants

Select and purchase your desired seed and follow the manufacturer's labeled directions for the seeding rate per area. Start plants in the greenhouse over winter to transplant into the landscape in the spring.

REFERENCES

Allen, C. M. (1980). Grasses of Louisiana. Grasses of Louisiana.

https://www.wildflower.org/plants/result.php?id_plant=muca2

<http://www.newmoonnursery.com/plant/Muhlenbergia-capillaris#:~:text=This%20grass%20is%20hardy%20from,rolled%20up%20toward%20the%20midrib.>

<https://plants.ces.ncsu.edu/plants/muhlenbergia-sericea/>

https://plants.usda.gov/DocumentLibrary/factsheet/pdf/fs_muca2.pdf

AUTHORS

Jennifer Blanchard; Instructor; School of Plant, Environmental and Soil Sciences
Eric DeBoer; Turfgrass Specialist and Assistant Professor; School of Plant, Environmental and Soil Sciences

Visit our website: www.LSUAgCenter.com

Pub. 3917-D (online) 3/24

The LSU AgCenter and LSU provide equal opportunities in programs and employment.