

News Column for Use Week of 3/2/2020
Kelsey Hatesohl, Extension Agent: Horticulture
River Valley Extension District
2/27/2020

Cutting Back Ornamental Grasses

March is a good time to remove dead foliage from ornamental grasses. Ornamental grasses will green up earlier if the old foliage is removed. They are also more attractive without a mixture of dead and live leaves. A number of tools can be used to cut back the previous years' growth. You could use hand clippers, weed whips (if the foliage is of a small enough diameter), weed whips with a circular blade attachment, or even a chain saw. If you are going to use a chain saw, you will want to use the top of the chainsaw bar to cut so the saw doesn't pull in debris and clog.

In addition, it is often helpful to tie foliage together before cutting so it doesn't interfere and is easier to dispose of. Another option to removing the previous years' growth is to burn it. You only want to burn the grass if it is safe and legal to do so. Burning works well on smaller ornamental grasses, as if it is too large, it could be hard to control the fire. Another tip is these grasses may not burn for long, but they will burn extremely hot. You will want to check the surroundings of your grasses before you burn to make sure burning is a safe option.

After you have cut back your grasses, look at the center of your plant. If the center of the plant has started to die out, the plant would benefit from a division. The outer edge of the plant is the newest growth. As the plant gets larger, the middle will die out and the outer edges continue to grow causing the plant to expand out and get larger. If the grass is getting to large for the space it is in, you can dig up the entire clump and separate the plant. Then, replant the vigorous growth found on the outer edge of the clump. By dividing the grass, you can plant the rest in other parts of your landscape or share the others with a friend! If you have any questions feel free to stop by or contact me in the in the Washington Extension Office by calling 785-325-2121 or emailing khatesohl@ksu.edu.