

## Niagara College Greenhouse & Nursery Success Sheet No. 67

# *Calamagrostis xacutiflora* 'Karl Foerster'

### History

Perennial Plant of the Year for 2001, *C. xacutiflora*'s name derives from the Greek word *Kalamos*, meaning "reed," and *agrostis*, for "grass." It originated in the Hamburg botanical gardens in Germany as a natural hybrid of *Calamagrostis epigejos* and *Calamagrostis arundinacea*.

In 1939, the Foerster nursery catalogue listed it as an annual but later reintroduced it in 1950 as a perennial in Karl Foerster's book *The Uses of Grasses and Ferns in the Garden*. In 1964, the grass was imported to the United States from Denmark and has since gained popularity in gardens and landscapes.

### Description

This ornamental grass will grow 8 feet tall with 18-inch-wide clusters. It produces shiny dark-green tufts of upright linear foliage 2 to 3 feet high in early spring and light-pink, feathery flower heads in heights up to 5 feet in June. In the fall, the mature seed heads become narrow and have a golden tan colour.

Stems may droop in wet or windy conditions but soon return to their vertical position once severe weather has passed. As a cool-season grass, its foliage could remain evergreen if grown in mild winters.

### Landscape Usage

The 'Karl Foerster' feather reed grass provides movement in landscape, which is set in motion by the slightest breeze. It is commonly used in the landscape as a specimen plant or in vertical screenings. It can also be used in pot containers for patio accents.

Floral designers appreciate it for its fresh or dried cuttings that produce golden-tan colours that last for months. These must be cut before the flower head matures.

### Propagation

Division in the early spring or fall propagates *C. xacutiflora* 'Karl Foerster.' A large clump of five to seven stems may be used in the landscape, producing flowers the following spring.

For indoor propagation, use smaller divisions in linear flats. These will develop flowers after a second growing season.

### Cultivation

*C. xacutiflora* 'Karl Foerster' is best grown in full sun or partial shade. This long-lasting perennial grass requires a well-drained fertile soil with adequate moisture but will survive in a heavier, dry-clay medium. To produce maximum height, fertilizer may be used.

This is a sterile hybrid that doesn't produce seeds; therefore, the plant will not become invasive. In late winter or early spring, the plants should be cut down to 6 inches, promoting new growth.

### Pests and Disease

Wet summers and poor air circulation may result in a foliar rust disease, but no serious pests usually occur.

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### Niagara College Greenhouse & Nursery

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