

## A RARE GRASS FOUND IN CHICAGO AREA

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USUALLY it is professional botanists who are responsible for the discovery of new or rare plants to be added to the known flora of the world. But often their attention may be directed to an unusual find by a layman.

In the late autumn of 1951, Christian M. Nielsen, architectural designer for the Chicago Park District, received from C. W. Larsen, of Glen Ellyn, Illinois, a flowering portion of a plant growing in that suburb. Mr. Nielsen gave his specimen to Barton S. Austin, landscape designer for the park district, for identification. Mr. Austin thought it resembled the ornamental grass known as pampas grass. In order to verify this identification he sent the material to the Department of Botany of Chicago Natural History Museum.

### 'ESCAPE' FROM IOWA

Here careful study of the specimen disclosed that the plant is an unusual ornamental grass, rarely planted in this country. It was known in the United States, according to latest records, only as an "escape" from a locality in Clinton County, Iowa (an "escape" is a plant that grows without care or attention by man either in or away from the vicinity of its original planting). This Glen Ellyn collection is, therefore, the first one ever made in Illinois. As this grass was reported growing at random in a vacant lot, this can be considered the second record of its occurrence as an escape in the United States.

The name of the plant is *Miscanthus sacchariflorus*. This species is related to a more commonly cultivated species of the same genus, *Miscanthus sinensis*, often referred to as eulalia. Both of these grasses are from Asia, but *M. sinensis* has been cultivated for some time in this country. Another species, *Miscanthus nepalensis*, with yellow-brown instead of whitish hairs around the flowers, is infrequently cultivated under the name of Himalaya fairy grass. It is a native of Nepal, India.

Because the herbarium of Chicago Natural History Museum contained only a fragmentary specimen of *Miscanthus sacchariflorus*, taken from a plant cultivated at Rochester, New York, and received some years ago for identification from the Florists' Publishing Company of Chicago, I visited the locality in Glen Ellyn to obtain additional collections. The vacant lot where the plant grows is located south of the residence of Mrs. Peter Gusie, 215 Lorraine Road, Glen Ellyn. It was through Mr. Larsen's and Mrs. Gusie's interest that the plant originally came to the attention of Mr. Nielsen. Many residents of Glen Ellyn had admired the plant and wondered what it might be.

When I arrived at the spot, I was pleased

to see a large stand of this ornamental plant forming a solid, dense colony about fifteen feet long and ten feet wide. Numerous upright stalks four to six feet high stretched above the dried buff-brown autumnal leaves attached to the stems and rising from the base of the plant. At the top of each of these tall stems were the beautiful, graceful fruiting sprays consisting of large fan-shaped plumes of soft, delicate, silky, white hairs. Viewed against the blue sky that day, the color contrast was exceedingly effective. I learned from Mrs. Gusie that this plant had been introduced from California by the original owner of the lot and that it has since spread out to form this large colony.

Like many other grasses, this species spreads vegetatively by underground stems (rhizomes) that grow in all directions from the original plant. Mrs. Gusie had started some plants in her own back yard and these had increased to form a stand of considerable size. She and her friends were using the feathery white inflorescences for winter home-decoration. Even though the fruiting sprays were beautiful at that time of year (around November 1), she assured me that they were even more attractive in September and October before they had begun to lose some of the hairs surrounding the seeds.

### OTHER ORNAMENTAL GRASSES

Many people think of grasses only as (1) lawn grasses, (2) pasturage or forage for cattle, or (3) sources of principal staple foods and cereal crops for man and other animals (rice, wheat, corn, rye, barley, oats). However, a number of grasses are grown purely as garden ornamentals.

Grasses, one of the largest families of flowering plants, are divided, on the basis of structural differences, into several tribes, one of which is called *Andropogoneae*. This tribe includes a number of ornamental forms. Many members of this tribe possess tufts of soft, white, yellow, buff, or golden-brown hairs associated with flowers and fruits and for this reason have a characteristic feathery or soft outline unlike most other grasses. The common prairie grass, also called blue stem or poverty grass, represents several species of the genus *Andropogon* of the tribe *Andropogoneae*. These species possess such hairs. Their pale-brown or russet-pastel shades of dry foliage lend a soft, white or buff-colored enchantment to the autumn landscape.

Other ornamental grasses are various species of *Erianthus*, known as plume grass; giant reed (*Arundo donax*), a native of warm regions of the Old World; uva grass (*Gyncrium sagittatum*), wild in tropical America, often used as a soil binder and for thatching as well as for musical wind instruments; and the well-known pampas grass (*Cortaderia*). Two kinds of pampas grass native in South America are cultivated. The commoner one



A GRASS NEW TO ILLINOIS

White fruiting spray of *Miscanthus sacchariflorus*.

(*C. selloana*), found on the plains from Brazil to Argentina and Chile, is a beautiful tall grass often seen on lawns as an ornamental plant in the warmer parts of the United States. The other (*C. rudiusscula*), from Argentina, is only occasionally cultivated. Many wild species of the genus are found in various parts of the Andes mountains of South America.

### SUGAR CANE ALSO ORNAMENTAL

Sugar cane (*Saccharum officinarum*), cultivated throughout the warmer parts of the world for its stems that are crushed for sugar, is a tall grass with attractive plume-like flower clusters of ornamental value.

Our own wild common reed grass, native in the Chicago region and other parts of the United States (*Phragmites communis* var. *Berlandieri*), is a striking and handsome tall plant with stout stems and smooth horizontally-spreading large leaves. At the summit of its stem is a large plume-like tawny cluster of flowers that is quite attractive and usable as winter decoration. Two other genera are cultivated as ornamentals. One of these, *Neyraudia reynaudiana*, native in southern Asia, resembles somewhat our common reed grass and occasionally is planted in the southern United States. The other, *Ampelodesmos mauritanicus*, is a native of the Mediterranean region and is likewise occasionally planted for ornament. Some of the above-mentioned genera (*Arun-do*, *Ampelodesmos*, *Cortaderia*, *Neyraudia*, and *Phragmites*) belong to the tribe *Festuceae*, to which the fescue (*Festuca*) and brome (*Bromus*) grasses belong.

How pineapples grow is illustrated in an exhibit in the Hall of Plant Life (Hall 29).





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