

# Hardy Pampas Grass Grows Well In North Carolina

Dear Plant Doctor: I am writing to obtain information and advice on pampas grass. The five-year-old pampas grass plants in my yard have displayed poor growth this summer. Several plants have developed rotten centers with the outside borders displaying poor growth.

Are poor growth and rotten centers due to too much rain? Are these plants susceptible to diseases, insects, or nematodes?

Please tell me the best way to care for my pampas grass plants. Please include fertilizer, pruning, or other cultural practices for optimum growth.—Laurinburg

**ANSWER:** Pampas grass has few insect, disease or nematode problems. The rotten centers you mention are due to the normal growth of the clump. Older clumps of this ornamental grass should be periodically divided to maintain plant vigor.

Pampas grass (*Cortaderia selloana*) is a native to southern Brazil and Argentina that was introduced to the United States in the mid-1800's. Pampas grass is hardy throughout most of North Carolina (except in the higher elevations) and will grow in nearly every well-drained soil type in the state.

In the late summer, mature plants develop a showy 2-to-3-foot, silvery white or pink flower plume that towers above the mound of leaf mass. The most beautiful and larger flower plumes originate from female plants. Seed will not be produced unless a male plant is within pollinating distance, and male pampas grass plants are scarce in the landscape.

Pampas grass does best in full sun. Shaded plants will often survive but not develop a bountiful bouquet of flowers. Plants have large spreading root systems that forage nutrients very efficiently from neighboring fertilized lawns or shrub beds so little supplemental fertilizer is normally needed.

However, if your plants are not vigorous as you would like and the foliage appears yellowish then consider applying extra fertilizer. The rule-of-thumb for applying fertilizer to pampas grass is to apply 1 cup of 8-8-8 or 10-10-10 per 1 foot of clump diameter after growth has initiated in the spring.

Pampas grass is best "pruned" or cut back in late winter. This allows for maximum enjoyment of the fountain-like shape and beautiful flower plumes in the fall and winter.

Pampas grass can be easily propagated by clump division during February or March. Dig and divide clumps with a sharp shovel or saw (I have even seen this plant divided by a back-hoe!). Replant the divided portion immediately in the ground or large pot. Maintain adequate soil moisture until the plant is well established.

Dear Plant Doctor: I have two problem weeds in my centipede-grass yard and do not know what to do to get rid of them (sample plants enclosed). Don't suggest pulling them up because I have tried that without any success—they keep coming back! I also have these weeds in an area with zoysiagrass.

I also have another problem. I normally use a granular fertilizer but in past years I see the granules on the surface all season long. So early this spring, I used a liquid fertilizer and the grass looked almost dead after several weeks. Now I am afraid to use it again. What fertilizers are better: liquid or granular?

**ANSWER:** The weeds you so kindly sent to me are spotted spurge (*Euphorbia maculata*) and Dogfennel (*Eupatorium capillifolium*). Both these broadleaf weeds can be controlled by applications of



Weed-B-Gon for Southern Lawns Formula II or similar products containing the herbicides 2,4-D, dicamba

and mecoprop. Be sure that the product is labeled for centipede grass and all label directions are followed since severe plant damage can occur with some formulations of these herbicides.

In a normal home lawn situation, little or no difference is evident between how a liquid or granular fertilizer provides nutrients to a grass plant. The main difference between granular and liquid fertilizer is cost and convenience. Neither formulation of fertilizer will work properly in an excessively acid or alkaline soil or in inadequate soil moisture.

Liquid fertilizers have the advantage of being rapidly available to the plant (through foliage and roots), are more uniformly distributed on the lawn, and, properly used, have less tendency to cause environmental pollution. However, liquid fertilizers are also more likely to burn leaf foliage, cause nutrient salt build-up in the soil, and cost more per fertilizer unit.

Granular fertilizers are less expensive per fertilizer unit, can be applied with ease to large areas, and most importantly, can be covered with special coatings to make the fertilizer "time released." Granular fertilizers


can also cause severe foliage burn and nutrient salt build-up. Granular and liquid fertilizers each have their uses; one is not necessarily better than the other. Either product will do the job if properly applied.

Dear Plant Doctor: Can you please tell me why or what would cause a nice cantaloupe to be tasteless and mushy inside?

**ANSWER:** No. The quality of cantaloupes is determined by many factors including soil fertility, weather, disease, insects, cultural practices, etc. ...

Growing good cantaloupes is like baking a "Blue Ribbon" pound cake; you have to follow a basic recipe but allow room for refinements. I am sending you Horticulture Information Note #8 "Muskmelons-Cantaloupes" by Dr. Doug Sanders (N.C. State University) that will tell you the best basic recipe for growing firm, sweet cantaloupes. Hope you have better luck next season.

Send your gardening questions and comments to the Plant Doctor, P.O. Box 109, Bolivia NC 28422. Please send a SASE if requesting a reply or publication.



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<p>16 Oz. - Thin or Reg. <b>MUELLER ELBOW MACARONI</b></p> <p style="font-size: 2em;"><b>2/\$1</b></p>	<p>46 Oz. <b>LIBBY'S PINEAPPLE JUICE</b></p> <p style="font-size: 2em;"><b>1.99</b></p>	<p>1/2 Gallon <b>HOMOGENIZED MILK</b></p> <p style="font-size: 2em;"><b>2/1.89</b></p>	<p><b>WILSONS</b></p> <p>Dozen - Grade A <b>LARGE EGGS</b></p> <p style="font-size: 2em;"><b>59¢</b></p> <p><small>LIMIT 2 WITH FOOD ORDER, PLEASE</small></p>



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