

In praise of *Deschampsia flexuosa*

Souren Ala



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D. flexuosa on Kingsley Common, near Alton

Deschampsia flexuosa. At first the name seems a bit of a mouthful – indeed, it sounds a bit like something a horse would enjoy eating. But repeat it a few times and it's not so difficult: it has a good solid sound, followed by the sensuous varietal name. And flexuous it is, with its graceful wiry stems ranging from olive brown to pinky orange in colour, small and sparkly, in large swathes in amongst bracken, gorse, heather and birch in our north-east Hampshire heathland.

It flowers attractively in early summer, before the other grasses, with copper-coloured flower heads with a pewter cast. But it wants a low soil pH and resists propagation. A commercially available bright yellow version, 'Tatra Gold', is beautiful, but it's not a strong plant.

Its cousin, *Deschampsia cespitosa*, has many familiar cultivars and looks wonderful in mass plantings. Though some consider it a bit coarse, through the summer it develops a fine haze of seed-heads to form a cloud through which taller plants can be grown. For gardens, *D. cespitosa* 'Goldtau' is most useful because it is short (80–90cm). 'Bronzeschleier' is also well thought of, and reaches up to 1.2m in height.



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D. flexuosa flowers in late June



D. cespitosa in cultivation

D. flexuosa is anything but coarse. There is comfort in its unobtainable delicacy, to be enjoyed only in nature's context! 🐾

Souren Ala is an Anglo-Iranian gardener and garden maker. His particular interest is ornamental grasses, but he follows the words of wisdom received from our President, to love and appreciate all plant species!

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