**Pennisetum purpureum** Schumacher

(Napier Grasses)

(Sometimes included in the genus *Cenchrus* L.)

- Although *P. purpureum*, the rampantly vigorous weedy African species also known as Elephant Grass, is associated in many parts of the world with the term Napier Grass, most selections sold as Napier Grasses in the U.S. nursery trade are of hybrid origin involving *P. purpureum* as one of the parental species; many hybrid cultivars in this group were developed by ??? from the University of Florida, predominantly from trispecific hybrids among *P. purpureum* x *Pennisetum glaucum* (L.) R. Brown x *Pennisetum squamulatum* Fresen.; 'Princess Molly' is a hybrid from *P. purpureum* x *P. squamulatum* that is smaller and has more greenish foliage; other common intermediate size cultivars with purplish or bronze foliage include 'Prince', 'Princess', and 'Vertigo'; many professionals in the nursery and landscape trade are now substituting Napier Grasses in their designs in place of the older *P. setaceum* cultivars due to their bolder textures and more rapid growth rates.

- Most cultivars in the U.S. trade were selected specifically for their sterility and in most cases purplish, maroon, or bronzy colored foliage; in general they resemble *P. setaceum*, but most have much broader coarser leaves; habits are erect fountains ranging in mature size from 2’ to 3’ to 8’ or 10’ tall in our region; flowers are not present on the selections predominant in the U.S. nursery trade, which is intentional given the potentially weedy nature of some *Pennisetum* spp.; any plants reverting to flowering forms should be immediately rogued from plantings; growth rates in eastern, central, and southern regions of Texas are sufficient for effective use as annuals regardless of winter survival, however much slower growth rates are reported in West Texas and the Panhandle; taller selections can be used as effective seasonal screens and most make eye catching accents.

- Cultivars vary in their tendency to turn green in higher nitrogen soils; likewise their varied genetic background results in a wide range of tolerances to cold temperatures, propensity to be infected by leaf spot diseases, and varied palatability to grasshoppers; most taxa will develop better purplish/maroon foliage on lower fertility sites; although it is hard to generalize among cultivars, most of the taller forms are less cold tolerant than the intermediate size selections; some cultivars are only cold hard in USDA zone 9 to 13, while others will dieback, but return from established root systems in USDA zone 8.