

Weed alert

Cogon grass (*Imperata cylindrica*)

Cogon grass is considered to be one of the top 10 worst weeds in the world. This perennial grass from Southeast Asia was introduced into the U.S. in 1911 near Mobile, Ala. as packing material in a shipment of plants from Japan and into Mississippi as a forage crop before the 1920s. Later it was introduced into Florida for forage and soil stabilization. Cogon grass was then found to be unsuitable for forage, and its ability to rapidly spread and displace desirable vegetation outweighed any soil erosion control considerations.

Cogon grass has extensively invaded disturbed areas such as roadsides and fallow pastures throughout North and Central Florida but also relatively undisturbed sandhill and pine flatwoods. Cogon grass forms dense stands that displace



Above: Ripe Brazilian pepper berries produce a toxic effect on native wildlife.



native plant communities. Because of its rough edges and silica bodies found throughout the leaves, it is mostly unpalatable to native wildlife species. Because of its dense, thick growth pattern, cogon grass degrades native gopher tortoise and indigo snake habitats in Florida.

Cogon grass stands can create a severe fire hazard especially when mixed in with other volatile fuels such as young pine trees. Fires occurring in cogon grass infested woods have significantly increased native tree mortality.

Why Cogon grass must be managed:

Cogon grass forms dense stands resulting in the almost total displacement of native plants that are important to wildlife. Cogon grass stands also represent a significant fire hazard on public conservation lands and agricultural forests.

Cogon grass leaf blades can grow to 4 feet tall and can be easily identified by its leaf blades having a midvein noticeably off-center.

Cogon Grass (*Imperata cylindrica*)

Synonymy: *Imperata cylindrica* (L.) Beauv.; *I. brasiliensis* misapplied

Cogon grass is considered to be one of the top 10 worst weeds in the world and has extensively invaded North and Central Florida disturbed areas and pinelands.



Leaves: Leaf sheaths relatively short, glabrous or pubescent; leaf sheath membrane, 0.5-1 mm long. Leaf blades erect, narrow and pubescent at base, flat and glabrous above, to 1.2 m (4 ft.) tall and to 2 cm (1 in.) wide, with whitish midvein noticeably off-center; blade margins scabrous, blade tips sharp pointed.



Flowers: Inflorescence a narrow, dense terminal panicle, white silky and plume-like, to 21 cm (8 in.) long and 3.5 cm (1.5 in.) wide. Spikelets crowded, paired on unequal stalks, with each spikelet surrounded by long white hairs.



Fruit: an oval or spherical capsule, woody at maturity, about 1 cm (1/2 in.) wide, holding 1-4 grayish seeds, these often short-hairy.



Illustration courtesy of Center for Aquatic and Invasive Plants, University of Florida

Look for first:

- Off-center midrib on leaf blades, more apparent towards the tip of the blade

Distribution

Commonly found in humid tropics but has spread to warm temperate zones worldwide. Found throughout the Southeastern U.S. and widely established in Florida.



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