

U.S. National Early Detection and Rapid Response System for Invasive Plants

EDRR Fact Sheet

Randy G. Westbrooks, Whiteville, North Carolina. USA.

Common Name: Cogongrass

Scientific Name: *Imperata cylindrica* (L.) Beauv.

Family: Poaceae

Description: A perennial, colony-forming grass up to 6' tall – with no apparent above-ground stem. **Leaves** arising from the ground, with off-center, whitish midrib and finely serrated margins, up to 6' long, up to 1" wide, stiff, with a sharp, pointed apex. **Flower heads** 2-8" long, silvery-white and cylindrical, in a large, fuzzy panicle. **Seeds** light and fluffy, spread by primarily by wind. **Rhizomes** whitish, branched, scaly, with sharp tips – forming a very dense underground mat.

Habitat: Cogongrass thrives in a wide variety of habitats, and is tolerant of shade, full sun, high salinity, drought, flooding, mowing, and fire. It currently affects forests, pastures, roadways and wetlands across most of the southeastern U.S. (*excluding North Carolina*).

Native Range: Southeast Asia.

Pathways of Introduction and Spread: Cogongrass was accidentally introduced into the U.S. as a packing material in shipping crates in Mobile, Alabama, around 1911. Later, it was intentionally introduced into Alabama as a pasture grass, and for erosion control. It reproduces and spreads via wind-borne seeds (up to 3,000 per plant) and rhizomes fragments. The feather-light, seeds can be carried as far as 15 miles by wind. The fragmented rhizomes are unwittingly spread by people through contaminated hay, soil, and soil – as well as by machinery, equipment, and vehicles. Blood Grass, which is a variety of Cogongrass, has been also sold as an ornamental grass in some parts of the country.

U.S. and Canada Distribution:

Ecological and Economic Impacts:

Cogongrass has been called the perfect weed. It affects 35 crops and infests 1.25 billion acres in 73 countries around the world. It is an extremely aggressive invader that forms dense, circular infestations with thick ground level mats that act as a physical barrier to the establishment of



other types of plants. In the process, it outcompetes native plants for nutrients, rooting space, moisture, and sunlight. It is also allelopathic – it produces chemicals that suppress the growth of other plants. By overwhelming native plants, it drives out ground-nesting wildlife such as turkey and bobwhite quail, as well as the endangered gopher tortoise, which depends on native grasses and legumes. While cogongrass roots are very fire tolerant, the plant is extremely flammable, and can cause fast-moving wildfires (to more than 840° F) that consume native plants and animals and disrupt the natural fire regime.

Control Strategies: The first step in controlling cogongrass is to remove ground level thatch and older leaves by a controlled burn during the summer. It reduces biomass, stimulates regrowth from the rhizomes, and allows herbicides to be applied only to actively growing leaves. If tillage of the infested area is possible, disking soon after a controlled burn will cut down on rhizome mass. To prevent spreading, equipment should be thoroughly cleaned after tilling. After 1-4 months of regrowth, a herbicide such as Arsenal (imazapyr) plus glyphosate should be applied. Follow-up treatments in the second and possibly the third year will be needed to eliminate the population.

Regulatory Status: Cogongrass is listed as a [U.S. Federal Noxious Weed](#). As a result, it is automatically listed as a state noxious weed in [Alabama](#), [California](#), [Florida](#), [Massachusetts](#), [Minnesota](#), [North Carolina](#), [Oregon](#), [South Carolina](#), and [Vermont](#).

Online Resources:

- Cogongrass Fact Sheet – BASF:

URL: <http://www.cogongrass.org/basfarsenal.pdf>

- Cogongrass Fact Sheet – Plant Conservation Alliance:

URL: <http://www.nps.gov/plants/alien/fact/imcy1.htm>

- Cogongrass Control Fact Sheet - BASF:

URL: <http://www.cogongrass.org/basffactsheet.pdf>

- Cogongrass Website:

URL: <http://www.cogongrass.org/>

- U-GA Bugwood Image Gallery:

URL: <http://www.invasive.org/species/subject.cfm?sub=2433>

- USDA Plants Database:

URL: <http://plants.usda.gov/java/profile?symbol=IMCY>