Center for Invasive Species and Ecosystem Health
UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA

cogongrass
Imperata cylindrica

Overview

Cogongrass is an invasive perennial grass that is native to southeast Asia. It was introduced first in Alabama in 1912 as packing material and in the 1920s and 1930s in four southern states as livestock forage. It has spread and been found in 10 states in the southern US.

Appearance

A colony-forming grass that can grow to 6 ft (1.8 m) tall. Leaves grow directly from underground rhizomes, as this species lacks above-ground stems. It dies back to the ground in winter.

Foliage has an off-center, whitish midvein with finely serrated margins. Leaves are up to 6 ft (1.8 m) long, 1 in (2.5 cm) wide, stiff, and have a sharp, pointed tip. Ligule (tissue where leaf connects to stem) is ∩-shaped and hairy. Rhizomes are whitish, branched, scaly and sharp at the tips; difficult to pull up by hand.

Flower heads are 1-8 in (2.5-20.3 cm) long, silvery-white and cylindrical. Blooms in April-May and flowering lasts a short time.

Fruit/Seeds mature on the flower head, are tan, and have long white hairs. A plant can produce up to 3,000 viable seeds/year.

Chris Evans, University of Illinois, Bugwood.org

Rhizome

N. Loewenstein, Auburn University, Bugwood.org

Flower Head

Chris Evans, University of Illinois, Bugwood.org

Foliage

Mark Atwater, Weed Control Unlimited, Inc., Bugwood.org

Ligule

Chris Evans, University of Illinois, Bugwood.org

Damage to trees from prescribed burn in cogongrass infested stand

J. H. Miller, USDA Forest Service, Bugwood.org

More Info

Spreads mainly by rhizomes carried on equipment.

Produces large amounts of rhizomes, plant parts, and seeds. When the plant dies back in winter, this biomass makes fire regimes dangerous for normally fire-tolerant species and ecosystems.