



Cogongrass

Imperata cylindrica

One of the World's Worst Weeds Invades Texas Forests



Common Names: cogongrass, blady grass, santintail, alang-alang, kunai, paillette

Description: Cogongrass is a perennial, rhizomatous plant in the grass family (Poaceae) that grows approximately 2 to 4 or more feet in height. The leaves are about an inch wide, have a prominent white midrib, and end in a sharp point. Leaf margins are finely toothed and are embedded with silica crystals. The lower surface of the leaf blade is often hairy near the base; the upper is hairless. The white plume-like flowers are arranged in a silvery, cylindrical, branching structure, or panicle, about 3 to 11 inches long and 1½ inches wide. Cogongrass reproduces both vegetatively and from seed. In spring, a single plant can produce up to 3000 seeds per seed head that may be carried great distances by the wind. Vegetative spread of cogongrass is aided by its tough and massive rhizomes that may remain dormant for extended periods of time before sprouting. Rhizomes can grow from 1.5 to 3 meters per year.



Identification



White Fluffy Seed Head



Off Center Mid-Rib



Sharp Pointed Rhizomes

Habitat: Cogongrass is a hardy species, tolerant of shade, high salinity, moisture and drought. It grows in coastland, disturbed areas, natural forest, planted forests, range/grasslands, riparian zones, scrub/shrub lands, urban areas, and wetlands.

Spread Identification

Cogongrass was accidentally introduced to the U.S. at Mobile, Alabama, in 1911 as packing material in shipping crates. It was also planted in Alabama, Florida, and Mississippi in the 1920s as a forage grass and for erosion control. However, it has no value as livestock feed and is too invasive for erosion control. Conservative estimates are 500,000 to 1,000,000 infested acres in Alabama, Mississippi and Florida.

Cogongrass is a Federal Noxious Weed, which prohibits its importation and interstate movement. Cogongrass spreads both by seeds and by rhizomes. A single plant can produce thousands of seeds each year. The small, fluffy seeds can be dispersed up to 15 miles by wind. Animals, equipment, vehicles, contaminated seed and hay, and people also spread cogongrass. The rhizomes can be spread in contaminated fill dirt and on equipment that hasn't been thoroughly cleaned. People leasing their land to hunters from Florida, Louisiana, Alabama or Mississippi or hiring vendors from these areas should insure that equipment is clean before allowing them on their property.

Cogongrass invades:

- roadsides
- rights-of-way
- forests
- pine plantations
- ditches
- pastures
- field edges
- orchards
- waste areas



It tolerates deep shade and full sunlight. Once established, cogongrass can spread rapidly, forming thick mats that exclude all other vegetation and reduce wildlife habitat. It is also extremely flammable, creating hazardous wildfire and prescribed burn conditions.

Ecological Impacts: Cogongrass is considered one of the 10 worst weeds worldwide and a pest in 73 countries. It can invade and overtake disturbed ecosystems, forming a dense mat of thatch and leaves that make it difficult for other plants to coexist. Large infestations of cogongrass can alter the normal fire regime of a fire-driven ecosystem by causing more frequent and intense fires that injure or destroy native plants. Cogongrass displaces a variety of native plant species used by native animals (e.g., insects, mammals, and birds) as forage, host plants and shelter. Some ground-nesting species have been known to be displaced by the dense cover that cogongrass creates.

What to do to help prevent cogongrass from invading your land:

- Learn what cogongrass looks like and promptly report any suspected infestation to your nearest land management agency or Cooperative Extension Service Agent.
- Make sure all equipment brought in from adjacent states has been thoroughly cleaned BEFORE it is transported to your land.
- Inspect all food plots and camp areas used by hunters leasing your land.
- Inspect all areas of your land that has had equipment on it.
- Store fill dirt brought from adjacent states or areas of Texas with known infestations, if possible, for a growing season and inspect it before spreading it on your land.

Control and Management:

- **Manual-** Multiple cultivations will eradicate cogongrass, however mowing and burning stimulates the growth and spread
- **Chemical-** It can be effectively controlled using any of several readily available general use herbicides such as glyphosate in September or October with multiple applications to re-growth. Repeat before flowering in spring to suppress seed production and again in following years for eradication. Revegetation may be necessary following herbicide treatment, to prevent soil erosion and to help reduce reinfestation by cogongrass. It is crucial that applications be made in early fall. Follow label and state requirements for herbicide applications.

