IDENTIFICATION OF COGONGRASS AND OTHER COMMONLY MISTAKEN GRASSES

A typical cogongrass leaf ranges from ½ to 1 in. wide and the mid-vein lies slightly off-center as shown above. Leaf margins can be rough to the touch, especially in older stands.

Sharp-pointed rhizomes with paper-like sheaths will pierce the roots of other plants and unprotected human hands and feet.

Japanese Bloodgrass is an ornamental variety of cogongrass that may be purchased in many states. It will easily become weedy in sub-tropical climates such as that in Alabama.

Cogongrass flowers in the early spring (Mar.-May), contrary to most warm-season grasses which flower in summer and fall. Each plume-like seedhead may have as many as 3000 seed.

A typical infestation of dense, undisturbed cogongrass stands about 30-40 in. and may vary in color from lush green to rather yellowed. Plants often appear stem-less, with leaves emerging at the soil surface.

HISTORY

Cogongrass [*Imperata cylindrica* (L.) Beauv.] was introduced to Alabama around 1911 near the town of Grand Bay. Since its accidental introduction, several intentional plantings have been made around the state and in Mississippi and Florida. Cogongrass has spread into 33 Alabama counties, as far north as Winston Co. For many years, a horticultural variety of cogongrass was promoted in Alabama under the name "Red Baron Grass" or "Japanese Bloodgrass". These plants are now illegal for sale or distribution in Alabama and some other states.

HABITAT

Disturbed sites such as:

Highway/utility rights-of-way

Forestry clear-cuts

Fallowed fields

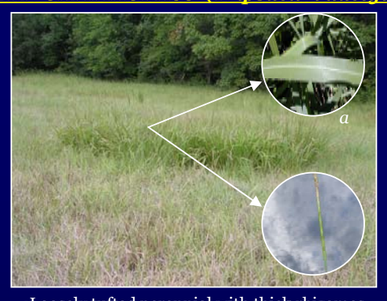
Industrial lands

Unsuspecting homeowners?

WHY IS COGONGRASS A PROBLEM?

Cogongrass displaces native plant species and can permanently alter an ecosystem, including wildlife and fire regimes. From a management perspective, cogongrass is undesirable on rights-of-way due to its unsightly nature and propensity for fire. Cogongrass may easily overtake newly planted pines and cause loss in numerous crops.

EASTERN GAMMAGRASS (*Tripsacum dactyloides*)



- Loosely tufted perennial with thick rhizomes
- Flowers late May-Nov.
- Low woods, ditches, roadsides, and waste areas
- Circular growth pattern strongly resembles cogongrass

FOXTAILS (*Setaria spp.*)

- Low-growing(<1m) annuals forming dense clumps
- Flowers July-Oct.
- Spiked seedhead resembles that of cogongrass

Yellow foxtail
S. glauca

Green foxtail
S. viridis

VASEYGRASS (*Paspalum urvillei*)

- Tall (1-2m) perennial with stout rhizomes
- Flowers May-Aug.
- Leaves similar in width to cogongrass except smooth and lacking offset mid-vein

SILVER BEARDGRASS (*Bothriochloa saccharoides*)

- Low-growing (<1m) in single or sometimes dense clumps
- Flowers June-Sept.
- White plume-like seedheads resemble cogongrass very closely

JOHNSONGRASS (*Sorghum halapense*)

- Tall (to 2m), fast-growing perennial with an obvious stem
- Rhizomatous and forms dense stands
- Flowers May-Oct.
- Wide leaf blade and robust growth form are often mistaken for cogongrass when seedheads are absent

SPANGLEGRASS (*Chasmanthium sessiliflorum*)

- Weakly rhizomatous, perennial grass, resulting in a growth form of loose tufts or clumps
- Well-adapted species that may thrive in deep woods or open areas
- Moist sites preferred
- Most often mistaken for cogongrass at forest edges, where the two may grow together

TALL FESCUE (*Lolium arundinaceum*)

- Cool-season grass
- Most commonly confused with cogongrass in the spring when both species are green
- Leaves similar in size, but lack off-set mid-vein
- Bunch-style grass that may appear as mat-forming in dense stands

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a. Mike Haddock, Kansas Wildflowers and Grasses. http://www.lib.ksu.edu/wildflower/easterngama.html

b. Virginia Tech Weed Identification Guide. http://www.ppws.vt.edu/scott/weed_id/setvi.htm

c. John Byrd, Mississippi State University.

d. James H. Miller, U.S.D.A. Forest Service. Image no. 16148. Invasive.org. http://www.invasive.org

e. Ted Bodner, Southern Weed Science Society. Image no. 16146. Invasive.org.

f. Jil M. Swearingen, National Park Service. Image no. 581065. Invasive.org.