Cogongrass

*Imperata cylindrica*

**Plant:** Aggressive, colony-forming perennial grass, mostly 0.5–1.2 m (1 1/2–4 ft) tall, with upright or mat-forming light green leaves having rough margins and an off-centered midrib, from sharp-tipped white-senary rhizomes with fibrous roots.

**Stem:** Upright to ascending, hidden by overlapping leaf sheaths

**Leaves:** Mainly basal, blades yellow-green to pale green with the midrib slightly to mostly off-center and whitish on the upper surface. 6–18 mm (1/4–3/4 in) wide and 20–150 cm (X–60 in) long and shortest upward. Flat or rolled to slightly corrugated, narrowing at the base with a long-tapering sharp tip, often drooping, margins translucent and minutely serrated, sheaths overlapping and hairy (or not) with hair tufts near the throat. *Ligule* a fringed membrane to 1.1 mm (1/16 in) long.

Flowers: March-May (year round in central and south Florida). Single terminal. silky, spike-like panicle. 3–20 cm (1 1/4–8 in) long and 0.5–2.5 cm (3/16–1 in) wide, cylindrical and tightly branched, with paired spikelets, each 3–6 mm (1/8–1/4 in) long, obscured by silky, silvery white or cream-colored hair to 1.8 mm (1/8 in) long.
**Seeds:** May–June. Grains brown, oblong, 1–1.3 mm (1/16 in) long, released within hairy *husks* for wind dispersal.

**Range:** Southeast Texas, southeast Louisiana, Mississippi, lower half of Alabama, all of Florida, southeast Georgia and southern South Carolina.

**Ecology:** Highly adaptable from full sunlight to partial shade. Aggressively invades rights-of-way, new forest plantations, open forests, old fields, and pastures. Persists and spreads by rhizomes and by prolific wind-dispersed seeds. A single plant can generate 3,000 seeds which can be dispersed as far as 80 kilometers (50 miles). The sharp-tipped rhizome is able to grow through the roots of other plants. Rhizomes branch to form a dense mat, excluding most other vegetation. Very difficult to control, being able to withstand burning and single herbicide applications.

Author and photos by Dr. James H. Miller, Southern Research Station. (Flowering cogongrass photo by Dr. Charles Bryson, USDA ARS, Stoneville, MS.)