Pest Alert

Protection Report R8-PR 36 July 1999

Cogongrass

Imperata cylindrica

Cogongrass–(Jan.)–dormant

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-scaly rhizomes with fibrous roots.

Cogongrass–shows plant & hairy throat

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 (8–60 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.

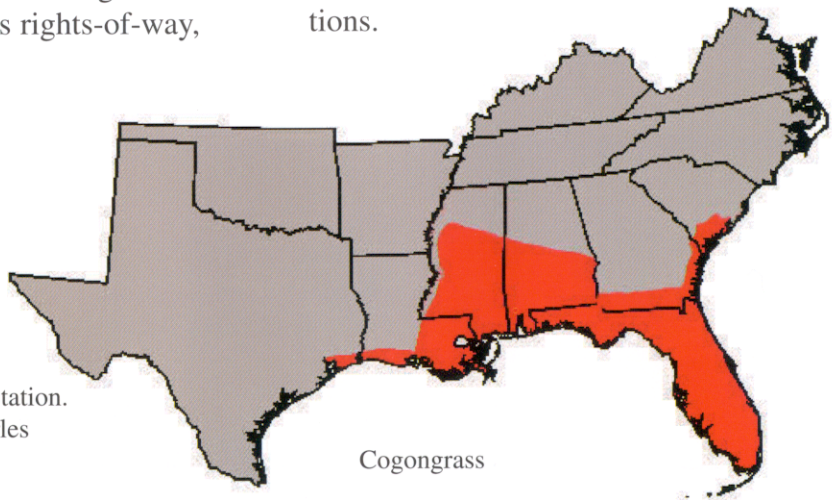
Cogongrass–(May)–flowering

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 hairs 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.



Cogongrass

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(Flowering cogongrass photo by Dr. Charles Bryson,, USDA ARS, Stoneville, MS.)