



NCDA & CS

Plant Industry Division

Plant Protection Section

**PEST
ALERT**

Cogongrass

Imperata cylindrica



Cogongrass (*Imperata cylindrica*) is a perennial grass able to grow up to 6 feet tall. The plant originated in Southeast Asia and was accidentally introduced into Alabama in 1911 (via packing materials) as seeds, and then intentionally introduced in the 1920's into Alabama and Florida as a forage grass for livestock, and a soil stabilization plant. This grass is a federal noxious weed and is a serious threat to the forestry industry, native plants growing in longleaf pine habitats, as well as agriculture.

Cogongrass form dense, circular patches that intrude on other vegetation. It spreads via rhizomes as well as seeds, and spread can be minimized by cleaning equipment involved with soil movement, grass mowing, and other industrial work. The grass burns very hot, which is a threat to forest managers that utilize controlled burning for help in establishing new plantations.

Identification

There are three distinct ways you can identify Cogongrass: from its flower, leaf, or rhizome (underground stem). The flower of the grass is typically silvery/white colored, cylindrical in shape, and blooms from late March to mid-June in North Carolina. The leaves arise near the ground with overlapping sheaths, giving the plant a rounded appearance from its base. The physical attributes of the leaves have a whitish, prominent midrib that is off-center with fine serrated margins. Leaf color is light yellow-green and could have a reddish hue in the fall and winter seasons.

The most distinctive way to identify Cogongrass from other grasses is to examine the rhizomes. First, you will not be able to pull the roots out of the ground by hand. Instead, you will need to use a shovel to dig up a section of the plant. The rhizomes from Cogongrass form dense mats that are typically covered in flaky scales. They are strongly segmented, bright white, and have very sharp points. The rhizomes are so sharp, they are known to puncture through cement walls, grow under sidewalks, and grow through the roots of other plants and trees.

Patches are quite dense (because the plant is allelopathic and other plant species cannot grow near cogongrass). The grass tends to grow in circular patterns, and can grow up to 6 feet tall, but averages about 4 feet tall. In North Carolina, the leaves stay green all year, even in the winter-time, so identification can be made at almost any time of the year.

History

This weed has been found 10 times in NC since 2012 and the goal is to eradicate it before it becomes a larger problem. The table to the right shows a timeline of when and where the weed has found.

Most of our discoveries have been made by NCDA&CS staff, County Extension Agents, and NC Forest Service employees.

County	Year	Status
Pender (#1)	2012	Eradicated
Stanly	2013	Eradicated
Martin	2014	Eradicated
Scotland	2015	In-Progress
Wake (#1)	2016	In-Progress
Wake (#2)	2016	In-Progress
Pender (#2 - Re-infest)	2017	In-Progress
Pender (#3)	2017	In-Progress
Pender (#4)	2017	In-Progress
Sampson	2017	In-Progress



Different Varieties

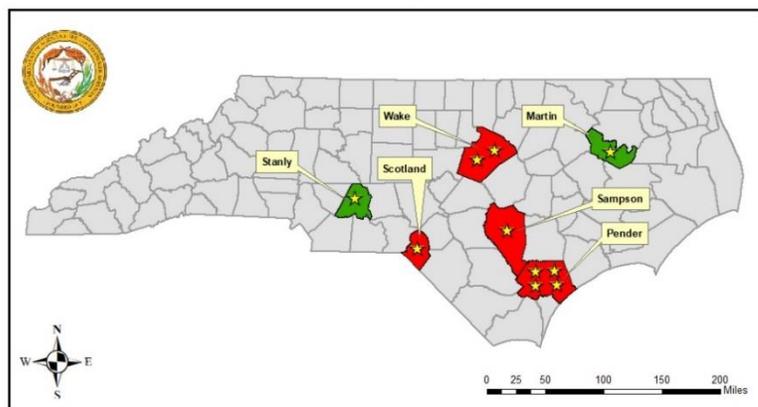
The Plant Industry Division, under the NC Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, has prohibited the propagation, nursery cultivation, sale and distribution of cogongrass, along with all cultivars, including Red Baron or Japanese blood grass since 2008. Unfortunately, many gardeners and homeowners planted this ornamental grass in the mid 2000's because it was "sterile", and quite attractive. Since that time however, the grass has undergone stress and reverted back to the green, "wild-type" green cogongrass. Those plantings are now considered invasive, and the

NCDA&CS is attempting to locate those plantings and eradicate them.

Current Situation

The current infestation of Cogongrass in Scotland, Wake, Pender, and Sampson counties are in the process of being treated. The recent infestations in Wake, Pender, and Sampson counties show that Cogongrass has spread to other counties. In order to identify the plant better on your property, a field guide has been published and can be found at: <http://www.invasive.org/weedcd/pdfs/cogongrassid.pdf>.

Infestation of Cogongrass in NC



Legend

- ★ CG Affected Counties as of 2017
- CG In-Progress Counties 2017
- Eradicated Counties

Cogongrass is on the federal noxious weed list and considered one of the top 10 weeds in the world. The grass has the ability to spread through seeds and rhizomes. The invasive weed competes with native plants, grasses and trees, choking them out with its dense root system. The grass isn't suitable for wildlife and its density makes it difficult for small animals to build habitats. It is a serious concern for land managers work with forestry, roadsides, and utility right-of-ways.

This weed has been found 10 times in NC since 2012: Pender #1 (2012), Stanly (2013), Martin (2014), Scotland (2015, In-Progress), Wake #1 (2016), Wake #2 (2016), Pender #2 (2017, Re-infest), Pender #3 and #4 (2017), Sampson (2017). Updated September 2017

Conclusion

Your help is needed to help us find and control new infestations of this plant. If you think that you have seen this plant, please contact the NCDA&CS Weed Specialist Dr. Bridget Lassiter (bridget.lassiter@ncagr.gov or (919) 707-3749). You are always invited to report invasive species to the NCDA&CS by calling 1-800-206-9333 or report by email: newpest@ncagr.gov.