

## What is Cogongrass?

Cogongrass (*Imperata cylindrica* (L.) Beauv.), is a very aggressive exotic perennial grass that entered Alabama in 1911 in packing material from Japan. It is on the Federal list of noxious weeds and is designated as the world's seventh worst weed.

Cogongrass is spreading rapidly across Alabama and the southeast, reducing forest productivity, destroying wildlife habitat, encroaching in pasture and hayland, and impacting rights-of-way. If left unchecked, it can quickly become the dominant understory, choking out desirable vegetation.

Cogongrass thrives where fire is a regular occurrence. It is highly flammable and creates a severe fire hazard. It burns extremely hot, especially in winter, and can kill seedling trees and native plants. During a controlled burn, the heat can be so intense that it can stress mature pine stands and lead to disease and insect infestation.

Dense stands of cogongrass can also destroy wildlife habitat. Cogongrass out-competes native grasses and forbs that are important to many threatened species like the gopher tortoise, Eastern indigo snake, Bachman's sparrow, Henslow's sparrow, and bobwhite quail.

Cogongrass is sometimes called japgrass, bloodroot grass (red varieties),



and Red Barron (red varieties), and may be mistaken for other grasses. The red varieties continue to be sold for ornamental plantings.

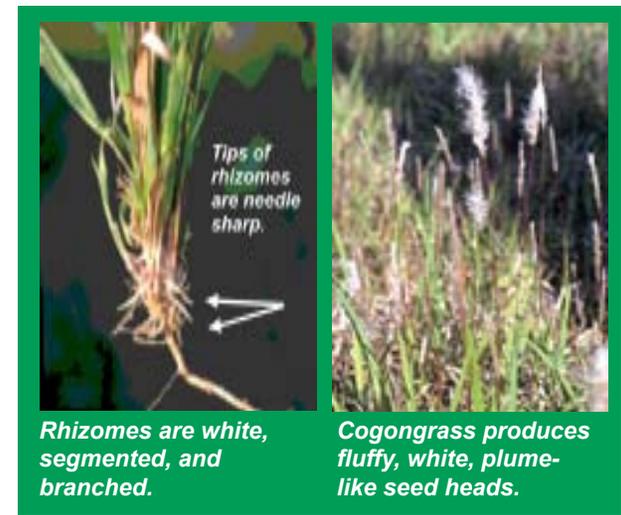
## What Does Cogongrass Look Like?

Cogongrass has some distinctive vegetative features that aid in identification. It rarely grows as a single plant, but quickly forms patches or infestations, often in a circular pattern. It can grow in full sunlight to partial shade. It aggressively invades rights-of-way, new forest plantations, open forests, old fields, and pastures.

Plants vary in height, even in the same patch, from 1 to 4 feet. Taller leaves lean over in late summer. Leaves measure .5- to 1-inch wide and are commonly 12 to 30 inches long. The leaves appear to rise directly from the soil, making the grass appear stemless, but short stems are present. The leaves rarely have a lush green color and appear yellowish green and may turn a reddish color in the fall.

Often the whitish upper midrib of a mature leaf is not centered on the blade as with most grasses, making identification somewhat easier. Also, leaf margins are rough to the touch due to tiny, saw-like serrations, a common trait of other grasses as well. This rough margin can cut the tongue of a grazing animal, and due to high silica content, cogongrass is a useless forage crop.

Another key identifying feature of cogongrass is its fluffy, white, plume-like seed heads that appear in late spring or early summer. Cogongrass can initiate flowering at other times of the year in response to a disturbance such as herbicide application, fire, mowing, or the first hard frost. Seed heads range from 2 to 8 inches in length and can contain as many as 3,000 seeds. Each seed has silky, white hairs that blow off like dandelion seeds.



Rhizomes of cogongrass are white, segmented, and branched and can extend 48 inches below the soil surface, but more commonly dominate the upper 6 to 8 inches of the soil surface. Rhizomes have sharp points and often pierce the roots of other plants and unprotected human feet and hands. Each rhizome segment can give rise to a new plant.

## Controlling Cogongrass

Cogongrass is commonly spread by contaminated equipment so, when possible, do not work in an infested area. If it is unavoidable, do the contaminated areas last and clean vehicles, equipment, and clothing before moving into an uncontaminated site.

Methods for controlling cogongrass may vary according to the rhizome age, mat density, and depth. Young infestations are usually easier to control than are older ones. For new patches, tillage can eliminate cogongrass from an area if it is continued during the course of a growing season.

Dry periods during the summer aid in the control of cogongrass. The area can be planted to a fall cover crop and then followed the next season with perennial or annual grass or broadleaf crops.



*Cogongrass varies in height, even in the same patch, from 1 to 4 feet.*

Many herbicides have been tested to control cogongrass, but only the active ingredients “glyphosate” or “imazapyr” have much effect. Both of these herbicides may cause injury to non-target plants. With all herbicides, follow the label directions carefully.

Controlling cogongrass can be quite difficult. Since it is found around homes, on public properties, paved and earthen roadways, forestland, stream banks, and farmland, there are not any generic recommendations for control. Recommendations should be site specific and considerate of the surroundings.

For additional information:

- Contact your local Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS), Alabama Cooperative Extension System office, or Tuskegee University.
- See documents in the “References Section” of this brochure.
- AL Job Sheet No. 595A: <http://efotg.nrcs.usda.gov/references/public/AL/595a.pdf>
- See the following websites:
  - Cogongrass Control Recommendations: <http://www.cogongrass.org/control.cfm>
  - Identifying and Controlling Cogongrass in Georgia: <http://www.cogongrass.org/cogongrasspub.pdf>

- Wanted Dead Not Alive: Cogongrass: <http://www.aces.edu/pubs/docs/A/ANR-1241/>
- Cogongrass (*Imperata cylindrica* (L.) Beauv.) Biology, Ecology and Management in Florida: <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/WG202>
- Cogongrass Forest Management Sheet: [http://www.forestry.alabama.gov/Forest\\_Management/FMS/Invasive\\_Species/Cogongrass.pdf](http://www.forestry.alabama.gov/Forest_Management/FMS/Invasive_Species/Cogongrass.pdf)

## References

Alabama Cooperative Extension System, *Wanted Dead Not Alive: Cogongrass*, ANR-1241, Sept. 2003.

Miller, James H. 2003. *Nonnative invasive plants of southern forests: a field guide for identification and control*. Gen. Tech. Rep. SRS-62. Asheville, NC: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, Southern Research Station. 93 p.

Alabama Cooperative Extension System, *Stop Cogongrass Hitchhikers*, by Dr. Nancy J. Loewenstein, School of Forestry and Wildlife Sciences, Auburn University.

Roach, Randy. *Cogongrass Control Project For Longleaf Pine In Southwest AL Via The Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program*, Partners for Fish and Wildlife, FWS, Daphne, AL.

*Identifying and Controlling Cogongrass in Georgia*, Adapted from Faircloth, W.H., M.G. Patterson, J.H. Miller, and D.H. Teem. 2005.

Front photo by Charles T. Bryson, USDA Agricultural Research Service

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## Help Needed to Destroy This Nuisance Weed



Helping People Help the Land