Cogongrass *Imperata cylindrica* (L.) Palisot

**COMMON NAMES:** cogongrass, blady grass, santintail, alang-alang, kunai, paillotte

**NATIVE RANGE:** Southeast Asia, Philippines, China, and Japan

**DESCRIPTION:** Cogongrass is a perennial, rhizomatous grass (*Poaceae*) that grows approximately 2 to over 4 feet in height. The leaves are about an inch wide, have a prominent white midrib, and end in a sharp point. Leaf margins are finely toothed and are embedded with silica crystals. The lower surface of the leaf blade is often hairy near the base; the upper is hairless. The white plume-like flowers are arranged in a silvery, cylindrical, branching structure, or panicle, about 3-11 inches long and 1½ inches wide.

Cogongrass reproduces both vegetatively and from seed. In spring, a single plant can produce up to 3000 seeds per seed head that may be carried great distances by the wind. Vegetative spread of cogongrass is aided by its tough and massive rhizomes that may remain dormant for extended periods of time before sprouting. Rhizomes can grow from 1.5 to 3 meters per year.

**HABITAT:** Cogongrass is a hardy species, tolerant of shade, high salinity, moisture and drought. It grows in coastland, disturbed areas, natural forest, planted forests, range/grasslands, riparian zones, scrub/shrub lands, urban areas, and wetlands.

**ECOLOGICAL THREAT:** Cogongrass is considered one of the 10 worst weeds worldwide and a pest in 73 countries. It can invade and overtake disturbed ecosystems, forming a dense mat of thatch and leaves that make it difficult for other plants to coexist. Large infestations of cogongrass can alter the normal fire regime of a fire-driven ecosystem by causing more frequent and intense fires that injure or destroy native plants. Cogongrass displaces a variety of native plant species used by native animals (e.g., insects, mammals, and birds) as forage, host plants and shelter. Some ground-nesting species have been known to be displaced by the dense cover that cogongrass creates.

**DISTRIBUTION IN THE U.S.:** Cogongrass is distributed throughout the south and southeastern United States as far west as eastern Texas. Cogongrass has been reported in Virginia, West Virginia and Maryland, and is on the noxious weed lists for Minnesota and Vermont.

**BACKGROUND:** Cogongrass was first introduced to the U.S. at Mobile, Alabama, via shipping crates that contained cogongrass as a packing material. It was also brought in and distributed by the U.S.D.A. for use as a forage grass and for soil erosion control. Cogongrass is also sold by the nursery trade as an ornamental grass, valued for its attractive foliage and hardiness.

**CONTROL AND MANAGEMENT:** Thoroughly wet all leaves with a mixture of one of the following herbicides mixed well with water and surfactant (September or October with multiple applications to regrowth): Arsenal AC* as a 1-percent solution (4 ounces per 3-gallon), a glyphosate herbicide as a 2 percent solution (8 ounces per gallon), or combination of the two herbicides. Repeat before flowering in spring to suppress seed production and again in following years for eradication. Revegetation may be necessary following herbicide treatment, to prevent soil erosion and to help reduce reinfestation by cogongrass. It is crucial that applications be made in late summer, actually early fall, and mowing does not buy anything via research findings. Multiple cultivations will eradicate as well.

Burning has also been used successfully in controlling cogongrass. As with mowing, burning stimulates the growth and spread of cogongrass, making follow-up control a necessity.


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