



Fountain Grass

Pennisetum setaceum (Forsk.) Chiov
Grass family (Poaceae)

NATIVE RANGE

Northern Africa

DESCRIPTION

Fountain grass is an attractive perennial grass with a densely clumped growth form and erect stems that grow 2 to 3 feet high. The small flowers of fountain grass are grouped in pink or purple, bristly, upright inflorescences 6-15 inches long. Fruits are small, dry achenes adorned with long showy bristles.



ECOLOGICAL THREAT

Fountain grass is a highly aggressive, fire- adapted colonizer that readily outcompetes native plants and rapidly reestablishes after burning. In Hawaii, where it alters the natural fire regime, fountain grass is a major threat to some critically imperiled plant species and natural communities. Fountain grass raises fuel loads, which increases the intensity and spread of a fire, and results in severe damage to native, dry forest species adapted to less extreme fire regimes.



DISTRIBUTION IN THE UNITED STATES

Fountain grass is found in Arizona, California, Colorado, Hawaii, Florida, Louisiana, and Tennessee. In the Hawaiian islands, it is found on the islands of Kauai, Oahu, Lanai, and Hawaii.

HABITAT IN THE UNITED STATES

In Hawaii, fountain grass invades many types of natural areas, from bare lava flows to rangelands. It has a wide elevational range but is limited to areas with a median annual rainfall of less than 50 inches. In southern California, fountain grass invades grasslands, deserts, canyons and roadsides.

BACKGROUND

First collected in Hawaii in 1914, fountain grass has been introduced to many parts of the world as an ornamental grass. It is a poor pasture grass and a serious weed in many dry habitats.

BIOLOGY & SPREAD

Fountain grass is a perennial plant with primarily wind-dispersed seeds that may remain viable in the soil for six years or longer. Its seeds may be dispersed greater distances by water, vehicles, livestock and humans.

MANAGEMENT OPTIONS

The long-lived seeds of fountain grass make its control extremely difficult. Small infestations may be managed by uprooting plants by hand and destroying the inflorescences in order to prevent seed dispersal. Removal by hand may need to be repeated several times per year. Extensive infestations of fountain grass are probably best controlled with the help of herbicides, especially those with some systemic activity.

USE PESTICIDES WISELY: Always read the entire pesticide label carefully, follow all mixing and application instructions and wear all recommended personal protective gear and clothing. Contact your state department of agriculture for any additional pesticide use requirements, restrictions or recommendations.

NOTICE: mention of pesticide products on this page does not constitute endorsement of any material.

OTHER LINKS

- http://www.hear.org/starr/hiplants/images/thumbnails/html/pennisetum_setaceum.htm

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PHOTOGRAPH

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REFERENCES

Cronk, Q.C.B. and Fuller, J. 1995. *Plant Invaders: The Threat to Natural Ecosystems*. Chapman & Hall: London. World Wide Fund for Nature.

Tunison, J.T. 1992. Fountain grass control in Hawaii Volcanoes National Park: Management considerations and strategies. In C.P. Stone, C.W. Smith, and J.T. Tunison (eds.), *Alien Plant Invasions in Native Ecosystems of Hawai'i: Management and Research*. Univ. Hawaii Coop. Natl. Park Resour. Studies Unit. Univ. Hawaii Press, Honolulu.