



NSW DEPARTMENT OF
PRIMARY INDUSTRIES

Weed Alert

HAVE YOU SEEN THIS PLANT?

Fountain grass

(*Pennisetum setaceum*)



Pennisetum setaceum. Upper Manilla.
Photo: JR Hosking.

INTRODUCTION

Fountain grass or African fountain grass is a highly invasive tufted grass. Plants are used as ornamentals in gardens and along roadsides, and are often found in motel gardens. Once escaped, this grass can form dense stands that exclude all other plants. It has been used for soil stabilisation and is a weed of pastures and alongside railway lines and roads. Fountain grass is of little grazing value due to its coarse rough leaves.

WORLD STATUS

Fountain grass is a native of northern and eastern Africa and south western Asia. It is now a serious weed in the United States and South Africa where it has invaded hot dry sites. Fountain grass out-competes and suppresses native vegetation and greatly increases fire risk.

In NSW it has a limited distribution to date. It has also naturalised in Queensland, Victoria, South Australia, Western Australia and the Northern Territory.

IDENTIFICATION

Fountain grass is a tufted perennial grass to 1.5 m high.

Leaves

Long narrow leaf blade to 3.5 mm wide and 60 cm long, with small forward directed teeth on leaf margins and the upper surface.



Pennisetum setaceum flower spike.
Photo: JR Hosking

Flowers

The flower heads resemble pink to purple bottle brushes 6 to 30 cm long. Flowers are present from late spring to mid winter.

The cylindrical seed head has spikelets up to 6.5 mm long and these are surrounded at the base by white to purplish bristles mostly 15–26 mm long with one to 40 mm long. The inner bristles are feather-like.

Plants previously referred to as *Pennisetum setaceum* 'Rubrum' are now considered to be another species *Pennisetum advena*. This species is not considered to be as weedy as fountain grass. It is able to be sold if labelled correctly as *Pennisetum advena*.

GROWTH AND SPREAD

Fountain grass can grow in tropical to semi arid areas and can live for up to 20 years. It prefers exposed, dry habitats, particularly rocky areas but can also grow in sandy soils such as coastal grasslands.

Fountain grass seed is mainly wind-dispersed but is also spread by vehicles, humans, livestock, water and possibly birds. Seed can remain viable in the soil for at least seven years.

FIRE

Fountain grass is well adapted to fire and fires may contribute to fountain grass spread.

Fountain grass can increase the intensity of fires resulting in damage to species and plant communities that are not as fire tolerant.

CONTROL

Fountain grass is difficult to eliminate. Control may need to be repeated several times a year. The long-lived seeds make continued monitoring after treatment is essential. Control should initially be directed to outlying populations followed by treatment of the core area.

Small infestations of fountain grass can be removed by uprooting and removing and destroying seedheads.

Extensive infestations of fountain grass are probably best controlled with herbicides, combined with mechanical techniques.

REFERENCES

Hosking, J. R., Sainty, G. R., Jacobs, S. W. L. and Dellow, J. J. (in prep) The Australian WEEDbook.

Lovich, J. (no date) *Pennisetum setaceum*. California Invasive Plant Council Database <http://www.cal-ipc.org/> accessed. 14.07.06



Fountain grass growing on rocky exposed sites near Split Rock Dam.
Photo: JR Hosking

WATCH OUT FOR AND REPORT ANY FORM OF FOUNTAIN GRASS:

Pennisetum setaceum is a Class 5 noxious weed throughout NSW under the NSW Noxious Weeds Act 1993. As a notifiable weed, all outbreaks of fountain grass must be reported to the local council within three days. The responsibility for the control of noxious weeds on private land rests with the land owner or occupier of the land.

If you have seen this plant, please report it to your Council Weeds Officer or NSW Department of Primary Industries for positive identification.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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FOR MORE INFORMATION:

Contact your local council weeds officer or district agronomist, or telephone the NSW Department of Primary Industries Hotline on 1800 680 244



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