

IMPERATA CYLINDRICA (L.) RAEUSCHEL

Poaceae (Gramineae)/Grass Family

Common Name: Cogon grass
Synonymy: *Imperata cylindrica* (L.) Beauv.; *I. brasiliensis* Trinius misapplied
Origin: Southeast Asia

Botanical Description: Perennial grass, growing in loose or compact tufts, from stout, extensively creeping, scaly rhizomes with sharp-pointed tips. Leaf sheaths relatively short, glabrous or pubescent; ligule a membrane, 0.5-1 mm long. Leaf blades erect, narrow and pubescent at base, flat and glabrous above, to 1.2 m (4 ft) tall and to 2 cm (< 1 in) wide, with whitish midvein noticeably off-center; blade margins scabrous, blade tips sharp pointed. Inflorescence a narrow, dense terminal panicle, white silky and plume-like, to 21 cm (8 in) long and 3.5 cm (1.5 in) wide. Spikelets crowded, paired on unequal stalks, with each spikelet surrounded by long white hairs.

Ecological Significance: Considered one of the top 10 worst weeds in the world, reported by 73 countries as a pest in a total of 35 crops (Holm *et al.* 1977). Introduced to the United States in 1911 near Mobile, Alabama as packing material in a shipment of plants from Japan (Dickens 1974, Tabor 1949, Tabor 1952); and into Mississippi as a forage crop from the Philippines before 1920 (Dickens and Buchanan 1971, Patterson *et al.* 1979, Tabor 1949 and 1952, Tanner and Werner 1986). Replanted to Florida from Mississippi for forage and soil stabilization in Gainesville, Brooksville, and Withlacoochee (Hall 1983, Tabor 1949)—these areas now with high densities of naturalized populations (Dickens and Buchanan 1971, Willard 1988). By 1949, more than 405 ha (1,000 acres) of the grass established in central and northwest Florida (Dickens 1974). Now frequent along transportation and utility corridors throughout Florida. Has invaded dry to moist natural areas in over 20 counties (EPPC 1996), including habitats of federally listed endangered and threatened native plant species (K. C. Burks, Florida Department of Environmental Protection, 1997 personal communication).

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Leaf blade, off-center midvein

Distribution: Commonly found in humid tropics but has spread to warm temperate zones worldwide (Hubbard *et al.* 1944). Currently reported for all of Florida, plus parts of Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, and Mississippi, along with an adventive (but perhaps not persistent) population in South Carolina (Allen and Thomas 1991, Elmore 1986, Bryson and Carter 1993).

Life History: Fast-growing; thrives in areas of minimal tillage, such as orchards, lawns, and roadsides (Patterson *et al.* 1979). Produces new rhizomes readily, facilitating the plant's spread at newly colonized sites; can propagate by rhizome fragments but does not survive well under regular deep tilling (Wilcut *et al.* 1988). Roots and rhizomes remarkably resistant to fire (Bryson and Carter 1993). Disperses over long distances into a variety of habitats by windborne seeds (Bryson and Carter 1993). Flowers in spring or fall, or year-round in central and south Florida (Willard 1988).



In Everglades National Park (foreground)



Dense panicle