

Imperata cylindrica (L.) Raeuschel



Common Name: Cogongrass

Synonymy: *I. 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 (0.02-0.04 in) 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 areas including habitats of federally listed endangered and threatened native plant species (K. C. Burks, Florida Department of Environmental Protection, 1997 pers. comm.).

Distribution: Commonly found in humid tropics, but has spread to warm temperate zones worldwide (Hubbard et al. 1944). Reported for 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). In Florida, documented as invading xeric hammocks, mesic flatwoods, herbaceous marshes, floodplain forests, and ruderal communities. Herbarium specimens recorded from 34 counties as far west as Escambia County in the Panhandle to Nassau County on the east coast, south to Miami-Dade and Monroe counties (Wunderlin and Hansen 2004). Has also been reported in natural areas from all of Florida's counties except Baker, Broward, Monroe, and Palm Beach (FLEPPC 2005).

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 wind-borne seeds (Bryson and Carter 1993). Flowers in spring or fall, or year-round in central and south Florida (Willard 1988).