

Fountain grass (*Cenchrus setaceus*)

Fact sheet | April 2015



What do they look like?

Fountain grass is a densely-tufted, long-lived grass with drooping leaves and stems usually growing 20-100 cm tall, but occasionally reaching up to 1.5 m in height. The flower heads resemble pink to purple bottle brushes 6 to 30 cm long. Flowering occurs throughout the year, but mostly during summer.

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.

The mature seed-heads turn straw-coloured or whitish and the flower spikelets are shed from the seed-head intact, along with the surrounding bristles. The seeds themselves (i.e. the grains) are yellowish-brown in colour and smooth in texture.

The light and feathery seeds are primarily spread by wind movement but are also spread by vehicles, humans, livestock, water and possibly birds.

Why should fountain grass be controlled?

Fountain grass is native to Africa and was brought to Australia for use as a garden ornamental but it has become an agricultural and environmental weed. Once escaped, this grass can form dense stands that exclude all other plants. Fountain grass has little grazing value due to its coarse rough leaves. It is a highly aggressive, fire adapted colonizer that out competes pasture species and native plants, raising fuel loads. This increases the intensity and spread of fire. It invades pasture, spreads rapidly along roadsides, rail reserves, watercourses and coastal areas. Fountain grass is supremely adapted to drought and will survive most conditions.

What are my responsibilities?

Fountain grass is declared under the NRM Act 2004. This means it is illegal to transport or sell this plant and all property owners have a responsibility to control fountain grass on their property. Residents who rent their properties also have obligations to control any weeds present. This also includes anyone who is leasing property unless other arrangements have been made.



What are the best ways to control fountain grass?

Established infestations can be difficult to eliminate. Control may need to be repeated several times a year. Fountain grass seed may survive for up to 7 years in the soil and seed set does not require fertilisation so continued monitoring after treatment is essential. A combination of the following methods will give the best long term results.

Chemical control

Large infestations of fountain grass are best controlled with herbicide. Plants must be actively growing (green) when herbicide is applied. If a large build-up of dead (brown) plant matter is present, slashing or burning of plants to encourage fresh green growth before spraying is advisable. Foliage should be thoroughly sprayed to runoff and care not to miss any part of the plant taken. A chemical dye marker can be added to the mixture to identify where you have missed. In 1 litre of water mix 10 mls of glyphosate and 10 mls of flupropanate. When using herbicides always ensure that you follow the label directions.

Mechanical control

Seedlings, small plants and small infestations can be grubbed with a mattock making sure all roots are removed. As grubbing may encourage growth from any remaining root system, monitor the site and then spray any fresh re-growth. Correct disposal of grubbed plants is essential to prevent further spread of this weed. Burn the plant if possible, otherwise bag the seed heads and place them in your rubbish bin for deep burial at the dump.

Further information

If you think you have fountain grass on your property, Natural Resources Eyre Peninsula can provide advice and assistance for its control and management.



Contact us

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