African feather grass

Cenchrus macrourum [preferred name]

www.weedbusters.org.nz

Family
Poaceae (grass)

Also known as
Synonyms: *Cenchrus caudatus*, *Pennisetum macrourum*, African feather grass



Photo: Trevor James

Where is it originally from?
Africa

What does it look like?
Perennial, clump-forming grass (<2 m) with deep fibrous roots and rhizomes (7 mm x <2 m long) that form new plants. Tough, harsh, strongly ribbed leaves (13 mm x 1.2 m) are light green on top and darker green underneath. Round erect purplish-white stems (<2 m tall) have many fine hairs that break off when touched, causing skin irritations. Narrow, cylindrical, spike-like flowerheads (10-20 mm x 10-30 cm long) contain many seeds, each with bristles (10 mm).



Photo: Trevor James

Are there any similar species?
Other *Pennisetum* species. Native toetoe and exotic pampas grow to 2-5 m have large, fluffy flowerheads.

Why is it weedy?
Rhizomes create dense spreading masses in well-lit sites. Seeds prolifically from two years of age with a seed viability of over 80%. Long-lived, medium to fast growing, and tolerant of many soil types, hot or cold temperatures, drought, wind, salt, damage, and grazing.

How does it spread?
Rhizomes creep outwards and fragments are spread by soil movement and machinery. Seeds are spread via water and by wind for short distances, and also in clothing, animals, pelts.



Photo: Carolyn Lewis

What damage does it do?
Outcompetes native pioneer species in vulnerable habitats and also invades established plant communities. Has the potential to cause build up of sand and changes in habitat, leading to erosion or flooding elsewhere, and loss of dunelakes and wetlands. It is also a fire hazard and can harbour rats and mice.

Which habitats is it likely to invade?
Bare sand, dunelakes, estuaries, coastline, river systems, low shrubland, dry and disturbed forest, potentially throughout New Zealand.

What can I do to get rid of it?
Contact your regional council to determine the status of this species and responsibility for control.
1. Physical removal - Dig out small infestations. Dispose of at refuse transfer station or burn.
IMPORTANT: Do not attempt to remove it when mature seed is present as this increases the risk of seed being spread on clothing and so on.
2. Foliar spray (Spring while actively growing and before seeding)
Apply 520g/L haloxyfop-P-methyl (3ml/L) plus label recommended adjuvant. Haloxyfop is selective for grasses and will not harm broadleaf species, however, in-store availability of this herbicide may be limited.
OR glyphosate (360g/L active ingredient at 10ml/L + label recommended penetrant). Note Glyphosate overspray will kill other (desirable) plants.
CAUTION: Not for use near water bodies or wetlands - check with your regional council. When using any herbicide or pesticide, PLEASE READ THE LABEL THOROUGHLY to ensure that all instructions and directions for the purchase, use and storage of the product, are followed and adhered to.

What can I do to stop it coming back?
Rhizomes resprout and seeds germinate in bare sites. Unpalatable to livestock so do not graze to control. Followup

spraying will be needed at least 6-monthly until no further regrowth occurs, so replant the area only with groundcover species that will not be affected by 520g/L haloxyfop-P-methyl spraying (that is, no grasses or flaxes).