Kikuyu

Cenchrus clandestinus

www.weedbusters.org.nz

Family
Poaceae (grass)

Also known as
Pennisetum clandestinum

Where is it originally from?
Central Africa

Photo: Trevor James

What does it look like?
Creeping, perennial, hairy, mat-forming grass with very long stolons that root frequently and occasionally climbing to 2+ m when supported by other plants. Also has long rhizomes. Soft, drooping, bright green to yellow-green leaves (5-40 x 3-9 cm) are alternate, sparsely hairy above and below, have folded blades and a fringe of hairs around the leaf where it wraps around the stem. Pale-green to white sheath has soft hairs (2-4 mm). Seedheads are made up of 2-3 tiny spikelets in upper leaf sheaths, and wispy anthers and stigmas that protrude from leaves.

Are there any similar species?
Axonopus affinis, *Paspalum distichum* and *Stenotaphrum secundatum* are all similar.

Photo: Trevor James

Why is it weedy?
Kikuyu grows rapidly, and scrambles over or creeps under most plants, forming mats. Tiny fragments are effectively dispersed. Tolerates wet to serious drought conditions, hot to moderate cool, salt, wind, damage and grazing, and most soils. It is intolerant of moderate frost and shade, but will extend rhizomes and stolons 3+ m into heavy shade from well-lit sites.

How does it spread?
Rarely seeds, so mainly spread by stolon and rhizome fragments. Seeds can be spread by livestock in their dung, and seed and fragments are spread by contaminated machinery and boots, dumped vegetation, soil movement, and road graders.

What damage does it do?
Forms dense, tight, long-lived mats, excluding all other species, and smothers all low-growing species, preventing the establishment of native plant seedlings. It can become the last species in an area where the native species have been completely overtaken by weeds. It blocks waterways and carries fire.

Photo: Trevor James

Which habitats is it likely to invade?
Disturbed forest and shrubland, short tussockland, fernland, herbfield, bare land, waterbody edges and bogs, and coastal fringes.

What can I do to get rid of it?
1. Foliar spray - Apply 520g/L haloxyfop-P-methyl (12ml/10L + label recommended penetrant). Haloxyfop is selective for grasses and will not harm broadleaf species, however, in store availability may be limited.
OR glyphosate (360g/L active ingredient at 100ml/10L + label recommended penetrant). Note Glyphosate overspray will kill other (desirable) plants.
Not for use near water bodies or wetlands - check with your regional council. Use only as directed on label.
2. Weed mat (small, isolated spots only) - leave for 2- 3 months. Only suitable around plantings.
CAUTION: 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?
Physical removal largely ineffective and creates disposal problems. Maintain rolling control front, check for occasional seedlings. Planting dense, 2 m + tall belts of shady, shrubby species can block spread into at-risk habitats.