Manchurian rice grass

Zizania latifolia

www.weedbusters.org.nz

Family
Poaceae (grass)

Also known as
Manchurian wild rice

Where is it originally from?
China

Photo: Trevor James

What does it look like?
Dense, mat-forming perennial (<2-3 m) with rhizomes (2-3cm diameter) up to 5 m long and fibrous roots. Harsh, papery, dull grey-green leaves (2-3 cm wide) are straight, up to 2.5 m long, have a stout midrib, taper to a point, and rustle loudly in the wind. From November to December a purplish or red-brown flowerhead (40-60 cm long) is produced.

Are there any similar species?
Raupo is similar, but has 1-2 m leaves that are thick and spongy, 2 cm wide, have no midrib, and twist upwards, it has a bullrush-style seedhead. Flax leaves are much wider, smoother, thicker and shinier than *Z. latifolia* and have a balsa-like flowering stalk.

Why is it weedy?
Seeds and rhizomes fragments spread rapidly and widely in wet or dry areas, and it forms dense, long-lived stands on land and water margins, overtopping other riparian species. Extremely tolerant of damage, grazing, cold or heat, wind, fire, different soil types, moderate shade and moderate salinity.

How does it spread?
Rhizomes spread outwards slowly, but more rapid spread comes from seeds and rhizome fragments being moved by water, livestock, machinery, clothing, and possibly by birds. Road graders, soil movement, dumped vegetation, contaminated diggers, farm machinery, eel nets, boats and trailers all spread seed and rhizome fragments into new catchments, lowland pasture, roadsides, water tables, drains and farm dams.

Photo: Trevor James

What damage does it do?
Forms permanent stands in water margins and dry land of nothing but *Zizania latifolia*, replacing all other species. Causes silt to accumulate, altering water systems, causing flooding and destroying habitat for aquatic fauna and flora.

Which habitats is it likely to invade?
All fresh or moderate-saline waterbodies and margins, wetlands, damp ground and fernland.

What can I do to get rid of it?
If you suspect that you have found Manchurian wild rice, report it to Biosecurity New Zealand using the pests-and-diseases hotline on 0800 80 99 66. Do not attempt to control the plants yourself. This pest plant is under an active national eradication programme, and any attempt to get rid of it could accidentally spread the pest.

What can I do to stop it coming back?
Rhizomes persist for years and can recover after spraying, and seed bank may reinfest bared areas, so ongoing control is important. To prevent problems with rhizome disposal, it is better to kill rice grass standing using an overall spray application: budget for 50-70% regrowth after first 1-2 treatments, 10% thereafter. Usually need 5-10 treatments over 6-8 years for eradication.

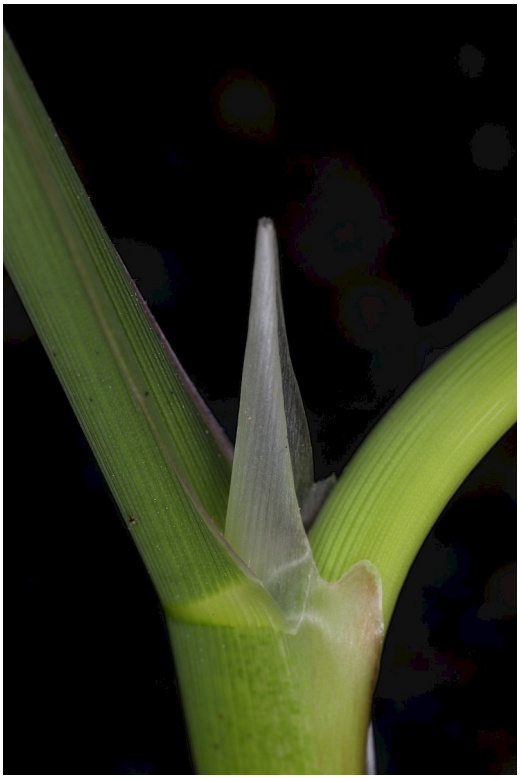

Photo: Trevor James