

Fountain grass

Cenchrus setaceus

Family

Poaceae (grass)

Also known as

Pennisetum setaceum, African fountain grass, *P. ruppellii*

Where is it originally from?

Africa

What does it look like?

Perennial, clump-forming grass (<1m tall) with deep fibrous roots and short rhizomes that form new plants. Very thin, tough and harsh green leaves, and round, erect, purplish-white stems (<1m tall) support narrow, bristly, purple-brown flowerheads (10-20cm long, 10-20 mm diameter) containing many seeds, each with bristles (20mm).

Are there any similar species?

Other *Pennisetum* species. Native toetoe and exotic pampas (all *Cortaderia* and *Austroderia* species) grow to 2-5 m and 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.

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?

1. Physical removal - Dig out entire root/rhizome mass. Dispose of at refuse transfer station or by burning.
2. 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 apply 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.

Tip Controlling when the grass has mature seed present increases the risk of seed being spread on clothing and so on. Carefully place a large bag over the seedheads and tighten around the stem/s. Cut the stems below the bag to capture and remove the seedheads before spraying or digging out the plant. Fasten the bag to ensure no seed can escape then double bag and dispose of to a refuse station.

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.



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Photo: Trevor James



Photo: Trevor James



Photo: Carolyn Lewis

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. Follow up 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 Gallant spraying (that is, no grasses or flaxes).