

Cogongrass, an emerging problem in natural habitats in SC.

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Cogongrass (*Imperata cylindrica*), an exotic invasive grass, has been a serious problem for years in the coastal plains of the Gulf states and Georgia. Until recently, it has been restricted to 1 or 2 small areas in the lower Savanna River valley in SC. Now we are beginning to see scattered outbreaks in other parts of SC. Part of the problem has come from people thinking "Oh, what a pretty plant!" and grabbing some to propagate. I suspect the outbreak spotted in the Francis Marion may have come from seed transported on a hunter's vehicle from other areas.

This is a plant that forms such dense canopies that all other plants get shaded out. It has a very profuse root-rhizome system underground, thus is very difficult to exterminate. It requires a combination of herbicides, mowing and maybe even plowing to wipe out the root system. The seeds are very light, and can be blown for miles, giving each infestation a large "reach". In addition, it is a warm season grass that retains some green leaves through the winter, thus it never quits putting away resources to grow with next year. On the other hand, almost all of our native warm-season grasses lose their green leaves to winter, and have to start over from the ground up in the spring.

The impact of cogongrass on ecosystems is very large. It strangles out native grass and wildflower communities, even young pine trees. It is very harsh to the touch, thus it is not readily eaten by grazing wildlife. The dense stands form a barrier to rabbit-sized mammals, and the endangered [gopher tortoise](#) cannot pass through cogongrass stands, thus becomes restricted in its natural territory because it cannot penetrate the cogongrass barriers.



Seedheads of cogongrass, *Imperata cylindrica*

Photo courtesy of Chris Evans, University of Georgia,
www.forestryimages.org

Now is the time to solve the cogongrass problem, before it gets widely established. If you spend time out in nature, please train your eye to recognize this plant. For photos of all stages of cogongrass, go to: <http://www.cogongrass.org/>. On this page is a photo of cogongrass flowering and beginning to produce seed. If you think you have spotted this plant anywhere in SC, Clemson University Division of Plant Industry at 864 646 2130.

Or go to:

<http://www.clemson.edu/for/reportcogon.html>, fill out and submit the electronic form.