

Stop Cogongrass Hitchhikers

Cogongrass (*Imperata cylindrica*) continues its rapid spread across Alabama and the Southeast, reducing forest productivity, destroying wildlife habitat, and affecting rights-of-way. This aggressive weed is spreading quickly by hitchhiking around the state, attached to skidders, road graders, mowers, food plot equipment, and other forest and road maintenance equipment.

Help slow the spread of cogongrass by following these three steps:

- Step 1: Learn to identify cogongrass.
- Step 2: Avoid cogongrass.
- Step 3: Clean vehicles, equipment, and clothing after operating in infested areas.

Step 1: Learn to identify cogongrass.

- **Leaves** – ½ to 1 inch wide, 1 to 6 feet tall; edge of leaves is rough like sandpaper; often yellowish-green with whitish midrib that is generally off-center, especially near the base of the leaves; leaves brown after a freeze
- **Flowers** – 2 to 8 inches in length, silvery white; seeds also silvery white, light and fluffy, will blow off like dandelion seeds; blooms in spring or early summer or after a disturbance
- **Plant base** – no apparent stem so leaves appear to arise directly from the ground; plants are more spread out than clumped



W. Faircloth, USDA ARS

- **Rhizome/roots** – dense mat of light-colored rhizomes (underground stems) that are covered in flaky scales; strongly segmented and with sharp points
- **Whole plant** – plants grow in dense, often circular, patches

Step 2: Avoid cogongrass.

- Cogongrass is spread by both windblown seeds (a single plant can produce 3,000 seeds) and underground branching rhizomes. Each rhizome, or fragment of rhizome, can start a new plant. Seeds or pieces of rhizomes moved to new areas in soil, hay, or sod, or on equipment can easily sprout and start new infestations.



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- Do not mow, bushhog, or even enter cogongrass when seed heads are present.
- Do not work in cogongrass when soil is muddy and rhizomes can easily be broken off and stuck on equipment.
- Do not grade or push roads or fire lines through cogongrass. If unavoidable, try to work in contaminated sites last.

Step 3: Clean vehicles, equipment, and clothing after operating in infested areas.

If working in areas infested with cogongrass is unavoidable, clean vehicles, equipment, and clothing *before moving to an uncontaminated site*. Cogongrass is classified as a federal and state noxious weed, and it is illegal to transport plants, seeds, or plant parts. Cleaning vehicles and equipment in the field may be challenging, but it is necessary to stop the spread of cogongrass, and it will keep you from breaking the law.



C. Evans / www.invasive.org



M. Atwater / www.invasive.org

Areas to check and clean:

- radiator, grill, undercarriage, and tops of vehicles
- blades and under the deck of bushhogs, mowers, etc.
- tires, rims, and tracks
- places where seeds and rhizomes can stick to grease and mud (seals, bearings, etc.)
- clothing (especially wrinkles, cuffs, and hats)

A pressure washer is the best tool for cleaning vehicles and equipment. If water is not available, use a broom and a shovel to dislodge as much seed and rhizome material as possible. In the field, follow best management practices:

- Do not wash off parts of the machine that have oil buildup.
- Do not use chemical detergents.
- Do not wash vehicles or equipment where water runoff can reach a stream.
- Clean in an open site that can be monitored and where new cogongrass plants can be eradicated.

Also schedule thorough cleanings at a garage or other facility as often as possible.

For more information about cogongrass and its control, visit <http://www.cogongrass.org> or contact your county Extension office. Visit <http://www.aces.edu/counties> or look in your telephone directory under your county's name to find contact information.



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