

African Feathergrass *Cenchrus macrourus*



Photo: Dana Miles

African Feathergrass invades pasture and native vegetation and is a declared weed under the *Landscape South Australia Act 2019*.

Description

African Feathergrass is a tufted, perennial, tussock grass that grows up to 2m high. The plant forms dense clumps and spreads rapidly by a vigorous rhizome system.

Leaves are light green and strongly ribbed on the upper surface. They are darker green underneath and sometimes purplish along the edges and tips. Leaves grow up to 1.2m long and 1.2cm wide.

Stems are erect, cylindrical and hairless. They grow to a length of 2m with several stems emerging from a single tussock.

Flowers are purplish, yellow or brown. The flower spike is 10 to 40cm long and surrounded by 1 cm long feather-like serrated bristles.

The roots are dense and fibrous, growing to a depth of 1m. Rhizomes grow can grow up to 2m long and produce new shoots along their length.

It is spread by seed and flowering takes place in late spring and summer with seeds maturing in February and March. The bristles on the seeds attach to wool, fur or clothing and are moved by animals or people. Seeds can move down streams with water flow. Wind can also move the seeds.

Impacts

African Feathergrass invades watercourses and wetlands where it forms a dense cover and displaces native vegetation. It can invade native grasslands and grassy woodlands, particularly where the vegetation is disturbed or degraded.

African Feathergrass is a poor competitor in well managed pastures. However it can become established in overgrazed pastures. It has low nutritional value and is avoided by stock, allowing it to grow to high densities that severely degrade grazing potential.

Dense infestations present a significant fire risk.

Distribution

African Feathergrass is native to South Africa. It has been used as an ornamental garden plant in Australia. It may also have been introduced as a contaminant of imported fodder.

It prefers open, well-drained soils. It is commonly found along watercourses, roadsides and wasteland where moisture is available.

It was brought to Aldgate and Mylor in the 1960's as an ornamental garden plant that has now spread to riparian areas, along roadsides and around dams.

Hygiene Practices

There are a number of hygiene practices that can help prevent the spread of African Feathergrass:

- avoid working in infested areas (except for control work)
- undertake control work prior to seed set
- do not remove seeds/plants from infested areas
- decontaminate stock prior to moving
- do not buy/sell contaminated fodder.

To prevent the spread of seed, thoroughly brush down equipment, people (boots etc.), machinery and vehicles when leaving an infested area.

Control Methods

Small plants can be physically removed using a spade or mattock. Care is required to remove all rhizome fragments from the soil. Larger plants may need heavy machinery such as an excavator to remove the whole plant. Excavated soil should be checked for all root and rhizome fragments or piled in an area that can be monitored for regrowth.

Herbicides provide an effective follow-up treatment on excavated, slashed or burnt plants when regrowth is approximately 40cm high.

For advice on chemical control techniques please contact a Landscapes Hills and Fleurieu Stewardship Officer or refer to PIRSA Weed Control Handbook at www.pir.sa.gov.au

What to do

If you suspect that you have African Feathergrass on your land, please email photos to Landscapes Hills and Fleurieu for identification.

This is a free service and they will also provide you with information on current control techniques.

Declarations

The following sections of the *Landscape SA Act* apply to African Feathergrass in the Hills and Fleurieu region:

- 186(2) Cannot transport the plant or anything carrying it
- 188(1) Cannot sell the plant
- 188(2) Cannot sell any produce / goods carrying the plant
- 192(2) Landowner must control the plant on their land
- 194 Regional Landscape Board may recover costs for control of weeds on roadsides from adjoining landowners



Photo: Dana Miles

Further information

Further information is available through Landscapes Hills and Fleurieu

Mount Barker Office: Cnr Mann & Walker streets, Mount Barker, 5251 (08) 8391 7500

Email: hf.landscapeboard@sa.gov.au



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