

Stop Cogongrass Hitchhikers

Cogongrass (*Imperata cylindrica*), sometimes called Japan grass, continues its rapid spread across Alabama and the Southeast, reducing forest productivity, destroying wildlife habitat and impacting rights-of ways. One way this aggressive weed is spreading so quickly is by hitchhiking around the state, catching rides on skidders, road graders, mowers, food plot equipment and other forest and road maintenance equipment.



W. Faircloth, USDA ARS

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

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

Learn how to identify cogongrass

- **Leaves** – ½- 1 inch wide, 1-6 feet tall; edge of leaves is rough like sandpaper; often yellowish-green in color with whitish midrib that is generally off-center especially near the base of the leaves; leaves brown after a freeze.
- **Flowers** – 2-8" in length, silvery white in color; seeds also silvery white, light and fluffy, will blow off like dandelion seeds; blooms spring or early summer, or after disturbance.
- **Plant base** – no apparent stem so leaves appear to almost arise directly from the ground, plants are more spread out than clumped.
- **Rhizome/roots** – dense mat of light-colored rhizomes (underground stems) that are covered in flaky scales, are strongly segmented and have sharp points.
- **Whole plant** – plants grow in dense, often circular patches.



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Avoid cogongrass infestations

Cogongrass is spread by both wind-blown seeds (a single plant can produce 3000 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 contaminated soil, hay, sod or on equipment can easily sprout and start new infestations.



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



Clean equipment 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 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 a challenge, but do the best you can. Every little bit helps and it will keep you from breaking the law!



Areas to clean and check:

- 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)

If water is available, a pressure washer is the best tool for the job. If water is not available, use a broom and a shovel to dislodge as much seed and rhizome material as possible. When 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 in a location where water runoff will reach a stream
- clean in an open site that can be monitored and any new cogongrass plants eradicated

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

Addition Information: Forest Management Sheets - Cogongrass

For more information [about cogongrass and its control](http://www.cogongrass.org) 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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