

○ African Feather Grass (*Pennisetum macrourum*)

Introduction

African feather grass is a tall growing grass which forms dense stands and excludes other desirable vegetation. It is largely unpalatable to stock and will invade pastoral areas. African feather grass is a prolific seeder with a vigorous root system capable of growing in a wide range of soil types and in a range of sites from swampy areas to dry banks. It has the potential to become a major weed of production forestry, roadsides, coastlines, wetlands, amenity and urban areas.

Pest Plant Status

In the Bay of Plenty region African feather grass is classified as an **Eradication Pest Plant**. (Refer Environment Bay of Plenty's Regional Pest Management Strategy.)

Landowners are asked to notify Environment Bay of Plenty of any occurrence of African feather grass on their property.

Environment Bay of Plenty will undertake and fund monitoring, surveillance and control of any infestation of African feather grass.

It is banned from sale, propagation and distribution in New Zealand.

Origin

A native of southern Africa, African feather grass was introduced to New Zealand in the 1890s as a soil binding plant. It was later promoted as an ornamental plant because of its distinctive long seed heads. It is now found as a pest plant in many regions of New Zealand.

Within the Bay of Plenty region its distribution is limited to infestations occurring at Opotiki, Tauranga, the Ohope Spit, and around the Rotorua lakes area.

Description

African feather grass is a robust perennial grass that forms dense clumps up to two metres tall. These clumps resemble those of the more common pampas grass. The erect clumps are rather stout (especially toward the base), usually 0.9–1.5 m tall, with up to five leaves per stem. The leaf base has a dense fringe of hairs. This is the most distinguishing feature for young plants that have not yet formed a seed head.

The leaves are up to 0.6 m long, 4–12 mm wide and taper to a fine point. The lower surface of the leaf is a whitish-green with prominent ribbing. The upper surface is darker green and may have a purple tinge along the edge and at the top. The leaves are tough, harsh, and feel rough if fingers are run down them.



African Feather Grass

The flower heads are narrow, cylindrical, up to 300 mm long, and straw yellow to purplish in colour with prominent bristles 10 mm long protruding from the body of the spike. When ripe, the seed falls away leaving the stem bare. The shape of the seed head readily distinguishes it from the larger pampas grass. Flowering occurs from November to April.

Rhizomes are up to five millimetres thick and enclosed in sheathing scales. Roots and buds emerge at the nodes.

African feather grass can survive heavy mowing and when regularly mown will appear as a coarse grass with a distinctive silvery sheen.



African feather grass seed heads

Invasion

Large amounts of seed are produced. Seed is surrounded by an arrowhead formation of bristly hairs that can be carried on fleeces and the hair of animals. Seed can also be dispersed by wind for short distances and by water for considerable distances.

Vegetative spread is by means of rhizomes, which grow rapidly over spring and summer.

Control Method

Due to regrowth from rhizomes, grubbing or cutting is an ineffective means of control. Effective control can be achieved through the application of herbicide. The recommended herbicide and application rate is as follows:

Herbicide

- **Gallant® NF**
Knapsack:
 150 ml per 10 litres water
Handgun:
 500 ml per 100 litres water

Crop oil must be added at 50 ml per 10 litres of spray mix. When applying the herbicide it is important that good coverage is achieved. Repeat applications may still be necessary to effectively kill larger plants.

CAUTION: When using any herbicide, please READ THE LABEL thoroughly to ensure that all instructions and safety requirements are followed.

Information in this fact sheet regarding herbicides does not necessarily appear on the labels of the products concerned. Environment Bay of Plenty does not accept liability for any damage that may arise from use of chemicals at non-standard rates. Mention of product trade names implies neither endorsement of those products nor criticism of similar products not mentioned.



For further information and advice, contact your local pest plant officer at Environment Bay of Plenty:

Telephone: 0800 ENV BOP (368 267)
 Facsimile: 0800 ENV FAX (368 329)
 Pollution Hotline: 0800 73 83 93
 Email: info@envbop.govt.nz
 Website: www.envbop.govt.nz
 Address: 5 Quay Street, P O Box 364,
 Whakatane, New Zealand

This fact sheet was prepared by Environment Bay of Plenty's Pest Plant Section.

This factsheet was last updated January 2005