



Invasive Plant Alert¹

Fountain Grass

Pennisetum alopecuroides (L.)
Spreng.

Fountain grass is a perennial grass often used in ornamental gardening. It has recently been observed escaping cultivation, and could become a serious weed in natural areas.

Where to Look

Fountain grass is originally from Asia and Australia, where it is found in meadows, open woods and along streams. It prefers evenly moist, well-drained soil and full sun, but can tolerate partial shade and poorer quality soils. It is considered drought-tolerant.

The distribution of naturalized fountain grass is unclear, but it is considered hardy in zones 4 and 5, but can be grown in zones 4-11. It has been reported as naturalized in New York, Pennsylvania, Illinois, and Arkansas.



Figure 1 Fountain Grass has showy flowering spikes. Bonnie Million, National Park Service, Bugwood.org

Identifying the Plant

Fountain grass appears as an upright, radiating grass, with heights ranging from 1 to 5 feet.

The green grass blades emerge in spring, approximately 0.25 inches wide. In early autumn, (late August, early September) flowers emerge and quickly grow above the grass blades on thin stalks. The flowers occur in ~5 inch long clusters, having the appearance of thin bottle-brushes. They quickly change from green to pink and violet to tan.

Fountain grass fruits will break open after a few hard freezes, scattering seeds which can form new plants. Of particular concern is the variety 'Moudry' – Black Fountain grass, which can prolifically self-seed.



Figure 2 Fountain Grass flowers in early autumn. Bonnie Million, National Park Service, Bugwood.org

How to get rid of it?

Control can be difficult. It tends to be more prolific in some areas, and some plants have been observed to be growing more vigorous than others. The variation has yet to be satisfactorily explained. It is best to simply not plant fountain grass (particularly the 'Moudry' variety). No studies have been conducted on the use of herbicides for the control of this

species. No biological controls have been found for this plant.



Figure 3 *Pennisetum alopecuroides* leaf blades. Bonnie Million, National Park Service, Bugwood.org

Resources

Ohio State University
Horticulture & Crop Science
Plant fact
sheet: http://hcs.osu.edu/hcs/tmi/plantlist/pe_oides.html

Fountain Grass, Grasses of
Iowa, Iowa State
University: <http://www.eeob.iastate.edu/research/iowagrasses/ornamental/PenniAlopeOr.html>

Pennisetum alopecuroides:
Bluestem Nursery Plant
Information
sheet: <http://www.bluestem.ca/pennisetum-alopec.htm>

Pennisetum alopecuroides,
USDA Plants
Database: <http://plants.usda.gov/java/nameSearch>

¹ This species has been identified as a potential or emerging threat to natural areas in the mid-Atlantic region