

African feather grass

Pennisetum macrourum

Also known as bedding grass, veld grass, and giant veld grass



African feather grass
Photo: K. McCombs (CCC)

Description

African feather grass forms dense, tussock clumps up to 2m high. The leaves are whitish green on top, distinctively ribbed, and dark green in colour underneath. The leaf edges feel rough when touched. The leaf sheath (below where the leaf joins onto the main stem of the plant) is covered in hairs. African feather grass produces fibrous roots and also produces rhizomes (thick underground stems that will form new shoots).

It flowers from December to April. The flowers form a long narrow spike, straw yellow in colour, and sometimes have a purplish tinge. The seeds have bristles which allow them to become easily attached to clothing, animal hair or wool.

African feather grass often gets confused with pampas grass and toetoe. To distinguish between the three:

- African feather grass produces a narrow flower spike, while pampas and toetoe produce fluffy flower heads.
- African feather grass has a hairy leaf sheath where as pampas and toetoe don't.



African feather grass seeds
Photo: K. McCombs (CCC)

Where is it found?

African feather grass is an uncommon species in Canterbury but has the potential to spread further into the region. The bulk of the infestations occur near Kaikoura.

African feather grass prefers to grow in damp places such as ponds, river systems, coastlines, estuaries and gullies. However it can also be found in bare sand, low shrubland and dry and disturbed forest. It was used as an ornamental plant for landscape purposes and is sometimes found in residential gardens, often around ponds.

Why is it a problem?

African feather grass has an extensive root system making it a difficult species to remove. It produces a large amount of seeds which are easily dispersed by wind and can be carried on clothing. This means African feather grass can be distributed to distant places where it may be difficult to control the species.

African feather grass spreads quickly, crowding out native low growing plant species. It is also a fire hazard, can block waterways and prevent site access.

Status

African feather grass is on the National Plant Pest Accord list. This means this species is prohibited from sale, propagation and distribution within New Zealand. In Canterbury, this species is known as a Progressive Control Plant. All sightings should be reported to Environment Canterbury.



African feather grass leaf sheath
Photo: K. McCombs (CCC)

If you think you have found African feather grass, please email the details to weeds@ecan.govt.nz or contact the Potential Pest Line (03) 363 9380 and ask to speak to a biosecurity officer.



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