

Fountain grass

Fountain grass (*Cenchrus setaceus*) is particularly problematic on roadsides, along railway lines and in native grassy woodlands. This long-lived perennial was planted widely as an ornamental grass.



What does it look like?

Fountain grass is an upright, densely-tufted grass that grows to 1m high. It has feathery pink-purple flowering seed heads, which grow to 8–30cm long and are made up of small seeds with feathery bristles attached.

Its leaves are narrow and linear in shape, and grow to 40cm long. Where the leaf blade joins the base of the plant there is a collar-like fringe of stiff hairs. The roots are fibrous and creep underground 30cm or more.

Flowering occurs sporadically throughout the year, but mostly during summer. The pink-purple seed heads fade to straw-coloured when mature. When seeds are shed, the feathery bristles remain attached. Seeds can remain viable in the soil for more than 6 years.

What is its impact?

Fountain grass is native to Africa and was brought to Australia for use as a garden ornamental but it has become an agricultural and environmental weed. Once escaped, this grass can form dense stands that exclude all other plants. Fountain grass has little grazing

value due to its coarse rough leaves. It is a highly aggressive, fire adapted coloniser that outcompetes pasture species and native plants, raising fuel loads. This increases the intensity and spread of fire. It invades pasture, spreads rapidly along roadsides, rail reserves, watercourses and coastal areas. Fountain grass is supremely adapted to drought and will survive most conditions.

Its light, feathery seeds are primarily dispersed by wind, but can be spread even greater distances by water, vehicles, livestock and human activities, including dumping of garden waste.



What can you do?

Fountain grass is difficult to control because of its many long-lived seeds.

Seedlings and small plants may be pulled up by hand when the soil is moist. Larger plants can be dug up with a spade or garden fork. Shake as much soil from the roots as possible before disposing of the plant.

If seed heads are present, dispose of the plants by cutting and bagging the seed heads and placing them in the household rubbish bin. The remainder of the plant can go in the green bin or be left to compost.

After removing the weed, provide competition to reinvasion by mulching the bare and disturbed soil, and replacing with bush-friendly plants as soon as possible.

Fountain grass seed may survive up to 7 years in the soil and seed set does not require fertilisation so continued monitoring after treatment is essential.

The non-seeding hybrid fountain grass (*Cenchrus advena*) is exempt from this declaration.

Chemical

For advice on chemical control techniques, contact the SA Arid Lands Landscape Board or refer to the *Weed control handbook for declared plants in South Australia*. You can find it on PIRSA's website at: www.pir.sa.gov.au/biosecurity

What are your responsibilities?

Fountain grass is a declared plant under the *Landscape South Australia Act 2019*. Sale or movement of plants or goods containing plants or plant parts is prohibited within the SA Arid Lands region.



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More information

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