

Invasive plants and animals

Elephant grass

Pennisetum purpureum



The problem

Elephant grass is a native of Africa introduced to Australia as forage for livestock. It is also used as an ornamental and structural landscaping plant. It has been widely planted as a windbreak and is still recommended as a highly productive tropical forage grass. It is common in coastal areas of Queensland and New South Wales, and is often seen growing wild on roadsides.

As an environmental weed, elephant grass can form bamboo-like, densely tufted clumps which become invasive in bushland vegetation. Garden plantings and the dumping of garden waste in bushland are the main sources of infestation of this weed.

Unmanaged forage plantings that are not grazed also contribute to infestations.

Elephant grass is an opportunistic weed with the ability to persist in disturbed areas, out-competing other native vegetation. In north Queensland, populations of elephant grass have become naturalised, and it may only be a matter of time before these infestations begin to replace native vegetation. Ornamental plantings of elephant grass should be avoided in all cases, and existing forage plantings should be managed or removed.

Serious infestations can be avoided by acting now.

Description

Elephant grass is a tufted perennial grass that can grow in stands up to 4 m high. It has pale green leaves up to 4 cm in width, with a strong midrib tapering to a fine point. The large flower heads range in colour from yellow to purple, and can be up to 30 cm in length. Each flower head has fine bristles along the spike.

Elephant grass is similar in appearance to sugar cane, but has narrower leaves and does not grow to the same height (cane will grow to 6 m).

Management strategies

Elephant grass can be grazed or dug/dozed out.

There are no herbicides currently registered for the control of elephant grass.

Declaration details

Elephant grass is not a declared plant under the *Land Protection (Pest and Stock Route Management) Act 2002*, however, plants that are not declared under state legislation may have control requirements imposed by local governments.

Further information

Further information is available from the vegetation management/weed control/environmental staff at your local government.