

Guinea grass

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Panicum maximum

Introduction

Guinea grass was introduced into Australia in the early 1900's from Africa as a pasture crop. Due to its aggressive nature it has now become both an agricultural and environmental weed throughout northern Australia.

Distribution

Guinea grass is found in all cane-growing areas of Queensland and New South Wales. It is also an environmental weed because it dominates riparian areas, roadsides and fence lines. It dominates areas susceptible to fires because it produces high levels of fuel that promote fires, but because of its large root system it is able to regenerate quickly and out-compete native grasses.

Guinea grass is a perennial that grows in clump or tufts. Its perennial habit can make it difficult to control with herbicides alone. Sugarcane growing conditions are ideal for Guinea grass, as it can withstand low pH and high aluminium levels in soils. It grows on nearly all soil types, preferring deep well-drained soils.

Description

Guinea grass grows to about 2 m tall, with leaves up to 70 cm long and 1-2 cm wide. The seed heads are large and spreading, with many branches. The seeds often have a purple tinge and are about 3 mm long and 1.5 mm wide.

Management

As with all weeds it is important to implement an integrated management approach.

- Reduce the weed seed bank by controlling weeds before they become mature and set seed; this strategy makes it possible to reduce on-going weed control costs. Under the right conditions Guinea grass can flower all year round, so vigilance is required.
- Slash headlands, drains and areas next to cane blocks infested with Guinea grass.

- Control weeds in bare fallows and legume fallows. A legume fallow is a good opportunity to control grass weeds with selective herbicides.
- Monitor – it is important to monitor crops and fallow situations for Guinea grass and thus know the best time to spray with confidence of obtaining good spray results.
- When using herbicides, select a product that is registered for controlling Guinea grass, and use robust rates.

Further information

For more information about controlling Guinea grass on your farm please contact your local adviser.

