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kentucky native plant and wildlife

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Be on the lookout-Japanese Bloodgrass or Cogongrass (*Imperata cylindrica*)

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Photo by Chris Evans, Bugwood

Infestation



Planted in the yard.

Photo by John C. Byrd, Bugwood

It has been called a pandemic in the south and it is spreading northward and has now been documented in Tennessee. It is on the Federal Noxious Weed list and is considered one of the top 10 worst weed species in the world. It has infested more than 153 billion acres around the world and people keep right on planting it!!! It is widely available in the nursery trade and all over the internet. The promoters of a cultivar called "red baron" make claims, which are unsubstantiated, that this species is not invasive although the Missouri Botanical Garden has observed that once it loses the red color from the leaves, it becomes invasive. The nursery industry calls this plant Japanese Bloodgrass because of the red and lime colored leaves. It is definitely a southern plant and was originally established in Grand Bay Mississippi in 1911-12 and has spread to over a million acres in Florida and hundreds of thousands of acres throughout the southeastern United States. It is considered a potential pest for most of the eastern United States and the Pacific Northwest. This species is very aggressive and is generally unpalatable for livestock. The question is, "Why should we care in Kentucky?" The answer is

quite simple. We continue to allow it to be sold in the landscape trade and it will become invasive over time, this we know. We need to be on the lookout for this plant and do not plant it in the landscape because we need to eradicate an infestation as soon as it is documented. It is very, very difficult to control (strong herbicides are used at a cost of more than \$200 per acre) and once it becomes established, game over. This may finally be the one species that gets the attention of the Kentucky Nursery Association because it will outcompete fescue and cows will not eat it, hence it poses a significant threat to one of our signature agricultural industries, beef cattle production. Now is the time to visit local nurseries and help educate them about this plant. Go to www.cogongrass.org for more information about this horrible plant and if you should be chance see it where it has escaped, let authorities know immediately so it can be documented and destroyed.