Cenchrus macrourus

COMMON NAME
African feather grass

SYNONYMS
Pennisetum macrourum Trin.

FAMILY
Poaceae

AUTHORITY
Cenchrus macrourus (Trin.) Morrone

FLORA CATEGORY
Vascular – Exotic

STRUCTURAL CLASS
Grasses

HABITAT
Terrestrial. A plant that likes damp situations such as swamps and the borders of streams, but can also tolerate drought and establish on dry shady banks. A plant that prefers light sandy soil. In New Zealand this plant has shown no preference for soil types or locality. A plant that grows in pastures, roadsides, urban areas, wasteland and roadsides, swamps and streambanks. The plant has been found growing in grazing land, cemeteries and private sections and amenity areas.

FEATURES
Perennial, clump-forming grass to 2 m. Deep fibrous roots. Rhizomes 7 mm diam, up to 2 m long, form new aerial shoots and roots. Leaves light green, strongly ribbed, darker green underneath, 13 mm x 1.2 m, tough and harsh. Stems erect, round, up to 2 m tall, purplish-white; with many fine hairs which break off when touched, causing skin irritations. Flowerhead narrow, cylindrical, spike-like, 10-30 cm long, 10-20 mm diam; containing many seeds, each with 10 mm bristles.

SIMILAR TAXA
African feather grass is easily identified by the 20-40 cm spike-like inflorescence on 2m tall clumps. P. Purpureum is a similar or even larger plant, but has panicles only to about 14 cm.

YEAR NATURALISED
1940

ORIGIN
trop. & Sthern Africa

ETYMOLOGY
cenchrus: From the Greek cenchos which means millet
Reason For Introduction
Ornamental

Life Cycle Comments
Perennial. The seeds germinate in autumn (some in spring) forming large numbers of new plants. A young plant starts to develop at about 7 months and by 32 months can have produced a clump of new shoots up to 1.5 metres in diameter.

Reproduction
New colonies will arise from moved or broken rhizomes. A plant with a vigourous creeping root system. New roots and shoots develop from nodes on the rhizomes, which grow rapidly in spring and summer.

Seed
Large numbers of seeds are produced. A prolific seeder. 88% of the seeds are viable.

Dispersal
Barbed bristles on the seed husk assists dispersal of the seed, by wind and in animal hair. The seed is also dispersed by water. Wind dispersal is only local.

Tolerances
Established plants are tolerant to drought.

MORE INFORMATION