Cenchrus purpureus

COMMON NAMES
elephant grass

BIOSTATUS
Exotic

CONSERVATION STATUS
Not applicable

CATEGORY
Vascular

STRUCTURAL CLASS
Grasses

SIMPLIFIED DESCRIPTION
Very large perennial grass, with 20–30 mm wide leaf blades. Inflorescence a simple spike-like panicle, involucral bristles plumose.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION
Robust tufted perennial grass to 3 m or more. **Rhizome** 6 mm diameter. **Leaf-blade** up to 75 cm × 3 cm, flat with numerous fine appressed hairs. **Culm internodes** with fine hairs for some distance below inflorescence. **Panicle** 14 × 2 cm, cylindric and spike-like.

HABITAT
Terrestrial.

GENUS
Cenchrus

FAMILY
Poaceae

AUTHORITY
Cenchrus purpureus (Schumach.) Morrone

SYNONYMS
Pennisetum purpureum Schumach.

ENDEMIC GENUS
No

ENDEMIC FAMILY
No

YEAR NATURALISED
1990

ORIGIN
Tropical Africa

REASON FOR INTRODUCTION
Ornamental

TOLERANCES
Tolerates a range of conditions (0–500 m), but killed by frost. Drought resistant.

LIFE CYCLE AND DISPERSAL
Perennial. Reproduction mainly vegetative.

ETYMOLOGY

cenchrus: From the Greek cenchros which means millet

NATIONAL PEST PLANT ACCORD SPECIES

This plant is listed in the 2020 National Pest Plant Accord. The National Pest Plant Accord (NPPA) is an agreement to prevent the sale and/or distribution of specified pest plants where either formal or casual horticultural trade is the most significant way of spreading the plant in New Zealand. For up to date information and an electronic copy of the 2020 Pest Plant Accord manual (including plant information and images) visit the MPI website.

ENVIRONMENTAL WEED (2024)

This plant is named in a list of 386 environmental weeds in New Zealand 2024 prepared by DOC. 759 candidate species were considered for inclusion on this new comprehensive list of environmental weeds in New Zealand. The species considered were drawn from published lists of weed species, lists of plants that must be reported or managed by law if observed, existing national and regional programmes and agreements for pest management, and species already managed by the Department of Conservation (DOC). Candidate species were then assessed to see if they were fully naturalised and whether they have more than minor impacts in natural ecosystems. Read the full report here.

NVS CODE

CENPUR

MORE INFORMATION

https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/cenchrus-purpureus/

PDF DATE

25 May 2026