

Cenchrus macrourus

COMMON NAMES

African feather grass

SYNONYMS

Pennisetum macrourum Trin.

FAMILY

Poaceae

AUTHORITY

Cenchrus macrourus (Trin.) Morrone

FLORA CATEGORY

Vascular – Exotic

STRUCTURAL CLASS

Grasses

CONSERVATION STATUS

Not applicable

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.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Perennial, clump-forming grass to 2 m. **Roots** deep, fibrous. **Rhizomes** 7 mm diam, up to 2 m long, forming new aerial shoots and roots. **Leaves** light green, strongly ribbed, darker green underneath, 13 mm × 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. *C. purpureus* is a similar or even larger plant, but has panicles only to about 14 cm.

LIFE CYCLE

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. New colonies will arise from moved or broken rhizomes. A plant with a vigorous creeping root system. New roots and shoots develop from nodes on the rhizomes, which grow rapidly in spring and summer. Large numbers of seeds are produced. A prolific seeder. 88% of the seeds are viable. 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.

YEAR NATURALISED

1940

ORIGIN

Tropical and southern Africa.



Cenchrus macrourus. Photographer: Auckland Regional Council, Licence: Public domain.



Cenchrus macrourus; spike. Photographer: Auckland Regional Council, Licence: Public domain.

REASON FOR INTRODUCTION

Ornamental.

TOLERANCES

Established plants are tolerant to drought.

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](#).

MORE INFORMATION

<https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/cenchrus-macrourus/>

PDF DATE

17 September 2024