

Imperata cylindrica

Recognize the problem

Family: Poaceae (grass family)

Common name: spear grass

Luganda: Lusenke.

Perennial grass with erect habit, 0.6-3 m tall with creeping underground stems; roots fibrous, up to 1.2 m deep.

Leaves: Stiff, up to 120 cm long and 2 cm wide at base, narrowing to sharp point at the top; with prominent white midrib.

Inflorescence: Fluffy white, spike-like flowerheads 5-20 cm long, 2.5 cm diameter.

Seeds: Brown, oblong, pointed 1-1.5 mm long, with ring of silky white hairs 10 mm long around base.

Background

Origin: Asia and East Africa.

Introduction: As forage, ornamental and accidentally as a contaminant.

Habitat: Humid tropical regions, grows in a wide range of habitats and soils types.

Spread: By seeds and rhizomes with wind, animals, machinery, vehicles and as a contaminant of crop and pasture seed and fodder.

Invades: Crops, plantations, grasslands, degraded and disturbed land, road and railway embankments, reclaimed mined areas, forests, commonly associated with slash-and-burn agriculture.

Impacts: The weed causes significant yield reductions in cereals, root crops and legumes. It effectively competes for water and nutrients in all cropping systems, can cause rotting of tuber crops from piercing by the rhizomes and inhibits growth of other plant species, as it has strong allelopathic effects. The weed is an inferior forage crop due to tough unpalatable leaves with low protein content. Fires stimulate its growth. Infestations cause changes in farming regimes due to plant competitiveness and damage to feet of humans and livestock as plants emerge from the soil. Spear grass is an alternative host for a variety of crop pests. Where infestations occur, farmers allocate most of their time and labour to weeding the grass.

Seed heads (whitish plumes) and flower heads. (Photo by Colin Wilson)



Plant base and rhizomes. (Photo by James H. Miller, USDA Forest Service, Bugwood.org)



Scientific name(s) > *Imperata cylindrica*

The recommendations in this factsheet are relevant to: All Countries



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