

## GRASSES — MONOCOTYLEDONOUS PLANTS

### *Aristida beyrichiana* (*Aristida stricta*)

- Common name: Beyrich threeawn; Wiregrass
- Form: Erect perennial, 1 ½ - 3 feet tall; forms dense, spreading tufts, bunch grass
- Leaves: Mostly basal, simple, long, thin, wiry, or needlelike with tufts of fine white hairs at each leaf base; margins strongly inrolled
- Flowers: Tiny, close to stalk with three distinct hairlike awns protruding from each flower; **September - November**
- Fruit: Grain; yellow; **September - November**
- Habitat: Flatwoods, pine forests, newly burned sites
- Comment: Wiregrass is one of the most common grasses of the southern pine flatwoods. Seed stalks are rare and are observed only after fire.





## *Arundinaria gigantea* ssp. *tecta* (*Arundinaria tecta*)

- Common name: Switchcane
- Form: Woody, erect, rhizomatous, perennial grass, to 7 feet tall
- Leaves: Deciduous; alternate, simple, on opposite sides of stems (2-ranked), lanceolate, to 12 inches long, 1 inch wide
- Flowers: Flower clusters 8 - 12, in flattened panicles; flowers very rarely; April - July
- Fruit: Grain; resembles wheat; April - July
- Habitat: Moist sites, including bogs, thickets, flatwoods, forest edges
- Comments: Flowering stems of this plant die when the grain has matured. Switchcane is shade-tolerant. *Arundinaria* is our only native bamboo genus and has been used by American Indians to make arrow shafts.

## *Ctenium aromaticum*

- Common name: Toothache Grass; Orange Grass
- Form: Erect perennial, 2 - 4 feet tall
- Leaves: Alternate, simple, on opposite sides of stems (2-ranked), slender blades, attached near base, slightly hairy sheaths
- Flowers: Spikelets on one side of a curved axis; 3 - 6 inches long in two rows at right angles to axis; June - August
- Fruit: Grain; dark red, shiny, linear,  $\frac{1}{16}$  inch long; June - August
- Habitat: Pine savannas, pine flatwoods, bogs
- Comment: Toothache grass emits a strong citrus aroma when crushed and produces a numbing sensation to lips, tongue and mouth if chewed.





## *Distichlis spicata*

- Common name: Saltgrass
- Form: Perennial, up to 2 feet tall
- Leaves: Alternate, simple, on opposite sides of stems (2-ranked), blue-green to gray-green, stiff, sharply pointed, coarse; spread along the entire stem; curing to a golden brown
- Flowers: Panicles; dense, spikelike; June - October
- Fruit: Grain; June - October
- Habitat: Salt and brackish marshes
- Comment: Saltgrass is an important food source for geese, other birds and certain species of larval butterflies. It is utilized in erosion control of moist saline and alkaline soils.

## *Echinochloa walteri*

- Common name: Coast Cockspur Grass
- Form: Erect, up to 5 feet tall
- Leaves: Alternate, simple, on opposite sides of stems (2-ranked), blades flat, linear, smooth, up to 2 feet long,  $\frac{3}{4}$  inches wide with stiff, hairy sheaths
- Flowers: Inconspicuous, on erect or slightly sagging bristly stalks; spikelets full of bristles; pale purple; June - November
- Fruit: Grain; white, ellipsoid, up to  $\frac{1}{10}$  inch long; June - November
- Habitat: Freshwater and salt marshes, ponds
- Comment: Coast Cockspur Grass is planted because of its use as food for many bird species.



## *Imperata cylindrica*

EXOTIC INVASIVE

- Common name: Cogongrass
- Form: Perennial, 2 - 4 feet tall
- Leaves: Alternate, simple, on opposite sides of stems (2-ranked), hairy on upper surface, hairless on lower surface; blades to 1 inch wide with finely toothed margins, off-centered white midribs, sharp point
- Flowers: Silvery, cylindrical, branching, 3 - 11 inches long, 1 ½ inches wide; February - May
- Fruit: Grain; February - May
- Habitat: Roadsides, forests, pine savannas
- Comment: Cogongrass has white, plumelike feathery stalks when in bloom and seed. It is thought that this aggressive invasive plant entered the United States in the Grand Bay, AL, area. This species is one of the greatest threats to our coastal habitats.





## *Panicum repens*

**EXOTIC INVASIVE**

Common name: Torpedo Grass

Form: Erect or leaning perennial, 2 - 3 feet tall

Leaves: Alternate, simple, on opposite sides of stems (2-ranked), stiffly ascending, narrow, linear, 2 - 10 inches long, ¼ inch wide

Flowers: Long, open, unbranched stalks, 3 - 9 inches long;  
January - December

Fruit: Grain; January - December

Habitat: Roadside ditches, brackish and salt marshes

Comment: This invasive grass is thought to be native to Australia. Because it grows in both aquatic and terrestrial habitats, it is very difficult to control.

## *Phragmites australis*

EXOTIC INVASIVE

Common Name: Common Reed

Form: Large, coarse, rhizomatous grass, to 12 feet tall

Leaves: Alternate; to 2 inches wide, 15 inches long

Flowers: Spikelets with 3 to 10 florets, July - Sept

Fruit: Grain; August - October

Habitat: Wet, muddy sites; saline or fresh wetlands; wet fill-sites and the edges of raised roadbeds

Comments: *Phragmites* is one of the most widespread flowering plants. Research suggests native stocks have interbred with old world imports to produce highly invasive *Phragmites* strains.





## *Setaria parviflora* (*Setaria geniculata*)

- Common name: Marsh Bristlegrass; Foxtail Grass
- Form: Perennial, 2 - 3 feet tall
- Leaves: Alternate, simple, on opposite sides of stems (2-ranked), upright, up to 6 inches long,  $\frac{1}{4}$  -  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch wide, straight, glabrous with flattened sheaths, keeled, membranous and ciliated ligules (leaf nodes)
- Flowers: Panicle; cylindrical, terminal, yellow, 1 - 2 inches long; [July - September](#)
- Fruit: Grain; [July - September](#)
- Habitat: Salt marshes, roadsides, savannas
- Comment: Flower clusters resemble fuzzy foxtails.

## *Spartina alterniflora*

- Common name: Smooth Cordgrass
- Form: Stiff, erect, smooth grass, 3 - 5 feet tall
- Leaves: Alternate, simple, on opposite sides of stems (2-ranked), up to 2 feet long, up to  $\frac{5}{8}$  inch wide, entire margins; hairy ligules
- Flowers: Spikes; open, branching, 5 - 20, loosely overlapping,



## *Spartina alterniflora* continued...

loosely appressed or spreading;  
spikelets, 10 - 40 on a branch,  
flattened, smooth, pointed tips in 2  
rows, twisting, only on branch undersides; **June - October**

- Fruit: Grain; **June - October**  
 Habitat: Tidal marshes  
 Comment: Smooth Cordgrass dominates the lowest salt marsh zone.

## *Spartina patens*

- Common name: Saltmeadow Cordgrass; Saltmarsh Hay  
 Form: Erect grass, 1 - 4 feet tall  
 Leaves: Alternate, simple, on opposite sides  
 of stems (2-ranked), blades hairless, 4 - 19 ½ inches  
 long, ⅓ - 1 ½ inches wide at the base  
 Flowers: 1 - 6 spikelets appressed to a stalk; **June - September**  
 Fruit: Grain, linear-ellipsoid; June-September  
 Fruit: Grain; linear-ellipsoid; **June - September**

Habitat: Salt and brackish marshes, scrublands

Comment: Saltmeadow Cordgrass forms dense, single species stands that appear matted and decumbent, similar to cowlicks. This species dominates the higher salt marsh zone





## *Andropogon glomeratus*

- Common name: Bushy Bluestem; Bushy Broom Grass
- Form: Erect perennial, up to 7 feet tall, green or blue with hairy white tops
- Leaves: Alternate, simple, on opposite sides of stems (2-ranked), flat or folded, up to 2 feet long, up to ½ inch wide; hairy leaf junctions (ligules)
- Flowers: Racemes; 2 - 3 bunches with 5 - 12 paired spikelets with long awns and dense hairs, expanded spathes; August - October
- Fruit: Grain; purple to yellow, linear-ellipsoid; August - October
- Habitat: Open forests, wet pinelands, wet roadsides, savannas, bogs, fresh and brackish marshes