

JOHNSON GRASS

The threat: Johnson grass could have a major economic impact on New Zealand agriculture by competing with pastoral grasses and crops.

Why is Johnson grass a pest?

Johnson grass (*Sorghum halepense*) is considered to be one of the world's ten worst weeds and one of the five worst weeds in New Zealand. It could have a major economic impact on agriculture should it establish widely here. Active management at all known sites in New Zealand has restricted the impacts here.

The plant forms dense spreading clumps that often out-compete grasses and crops. Seed or pieces of rhizome may contaminate cultivation and harvesting equipment and be transported to new sites. It can also be toxic to stock.

Johnson grass is one of the pests being eradicated under the National Interest Pest Response programme led and funded by MAF Biosecurity New Zealand in partnership with regional councils and the Department of Conservation. It is both a notifiable organism and an unwanted organism under the Biosecurity Act 1993 and is banned from sale, propagation and distribution.

Where is it found?

Johnson grass has been found from Northland to Canterbury. Sixty-five of the known sites are now considered eliminated, having been clear of the plant for at least seven years. Two sites are active.

What does Johnson grass look like?

Johnson grass, a native of the Mediterranean (Southern Europe, North Africa and Western Asia), is a robust, aggressive, perennial, summer grass capable of forming dense thickets that exclude most other plants.

Seedlings are very similar to young maize plants both in habit and growth pattern. Mature plants vary in height from 500 – 3000 mm. Leaf blades are flat, alternate, up to 900mm long and 20 – 50 mm wide. The midrib on the underside is whitish. Leaf sheaths are ribbed and often hairy on the inside of the junction with the blade. Flowers are large, loosely branched, purplish and hairy. Seeds are reddish brown and up to 6mm long. It has woody rhizomes that root at nodes.

What should I do if I find Johnson grass?

You can help us get rid of Johnson grass. If you have seen it or suspect you have seen it, please report it to MAF Biosecurity New Zealand on freephone **0800 08 99 66**.



PARTY EXCAVATED PLANT SHOWING RHIZOMES



FLOWERING PLANT

FOR MORE INFORMATION VISIT: WWW.BIOSECURITY.GOV.TZ

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