

UROCHLOA MUTICA (FORSK.) NGUYEN

Poaceae (Gramineae)/Grass Family

Common Names: Pará grass, California grass, buffalo grass, water grass, Scotch grass, Carib grass

Synonymy: *Brachiaria mutica* (Forsk.) Stapf, *Brachiaria purpurescens* (Raddi) Henr., *Panicum muticum* Forsk., *Panicum purpurescens* Raddi

Origin: Africa

Botanical Description: Perennial grass from widely creeping stolons. Stems reclining at base, rooting at the lower nodes, to 1 m (3 ft) tall when erect, to 3 m (15 ft) long when creeping; nodes swollen, densely hairy. Leaf sheaths with dense stiff hairs below, slightly hairy above; ligule a densely ciliate membrane; leaf blades flat, 10-15 mm (0.4-0.6 in) wide and 25-30 cm (10-12 in) long, glabrous but often with small fine hairs at base above and below. Inflorescence a terminal panicle to 20 cm (8 in) long, with 8-20 ascending, alternate branches; spikelets (reduced flowers) dense on the branches, paired, each about 3 mm long, glabrous, often purple tinged.

Ecological Significance: Introduced in most tropical and subtropical regions of the world as a fodder grass, but also considered one of the world's worst weeds; reported as an agricultural pest in 23 crops in 34 countries, including the United States (Holm *et al.* 1977). Competes aggressively with other plants, with fast growth, high productivity, and allelopathic abilities that allow it to form dense monocultural stands (Chang-Hung 1977, Handley *et al.* 1989). Probably introduced into the Americas via Brazil "at an early date" (Hitchcock and Chase 1951); may have been introduced into Florida as early as the late 1870s (Austin 1978); recommended for pasturage here in 1919 (Thompson 1919b). Invades disturbed low areas such as canals, but also displaces native vegetation along river and lake shorelines and in marshes and swamps. Found in 51 public water bodies in 1982 and 183 water bodies by 1994—down from a 1986 high of 207, or 52% of Florida's public waters (Schardt and Schmitz 1991, Schardt 1997).

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In Myakka River basin, Sarasota County

Distribution: Now commonly escaped from cultivation in central and south Florida. Documented by herbarium specimens from 15 counties, from Pinellas on the west to Brevard on the east and south to the Florida Keys (Wunderlin *et al.* 1995). Also reported from wetland natural areas in Sarasota, Hillsborough, Martin, and Palm Beach counties (EPPC 1996).

Life History: Flourishes in wet conditions, able to form a stolon mat 1 m (3 ft) or more in depth (Holm *et al.* 1977) and send floating stems of 6 m (18 ft) or more in length across slow-moving water (Handley and Ekern 1981). Also tolerant of drought and of brackish water, but susceptible to frost (Holm *et al.* 1977). Reproduces and spreads primarily by stem fragments (Sainty and Jacobs 1981). Flowers from September through December in Florida (Hall 1978), but production of fertile seeds apparently low (Thompson 1919b).

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Panicle

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Hairy node and sheath