



MISCANTHUS

Madison County's "Wildfire Grass"

DID YOU KNOW?

The Mars Hill, Grapevine, Petersburg, and Paint Fork areas of Madison County have extensive infestations of *Miscanthus sinensis*. It is quickly spreading into the Hot Springs, Laurel, Spring Creek, Big Pine, Marshall, and Walnut areas of the county.

In 2020, 80% of Madison County's wildfires occurred in the Mars Hill Fire District where the *Miscanthus* infestation is the worst.



What is *Miscanthus* (aka pampas grass)?

Miscanthus is commonly referred to as pampas grass or Mars Hill grass in Madison County. It is also known as maiden grass, eulalia and Chinese silvergrass.

Miscanthus is:

- Tall, perennial, densely bunched grass that can grow 5 to 10 feet in height.
- Elongated, upright to arching leaves 3 feet long and 1 inch wide with whitish upper midrib; leaves have sharp tips and rough margins.
- Blades are green to variegated (light green horizontal stripes).
- Showy, fan-shaped, silvery to pink, terminal inflorescence that emerges in late August to early September and matures in early fall.



Photo: Chris Evans, University of Illinois, Bugwood.org

Where did *Miscanthus* come from?

Miscanthus is native to eastern Asia throughout China, Japan and Korea. It was introduced to the United States more than a century ago as an ornamental landscaping plant. Since, it has spread across the eastern United States, and in our state, it is most prevalent in Western North Carolina. In Madison County, the most severe infestations of *Miscanthus* are in the southern and eastern portions of the county specifically the Mars Hill, Grapevine and Petersburg areas.

Why is *Miscanthus* harmful?

Spreading through farm fields and along roadsides in the Interstate Highway 26 corridor, large masses of *Miscanthus* are one of the most serious wildfire hazards in Madison County.

- Because of its high flammability, *Miscanthus* has the potential to fuel massive wildfires, a danger to life and property.
- Fires from *Miscanthus* can get hot enough to scar and kill standing timber, reducing the value and area of forestland in Madison County.

Miscanthus smothers native grasses and shrubs, destroying critical wildlife habitat. When growing in a pasture, it can smother valuable livestock forage species. Most livestock won't eat *Miscanthus* when mature.

How does *Miscanthus* spread?

Miscanthus reproduces through wind-dispersed seeds and rhizomes. This grass can form extensive infestations by escaping from established ornamental plantings into disturbed areas where it forms dense clumps that displace native vegetation. In Madison County, *Miscanthus* is quickly spreading into the Marshall, Walnut, Spring Creek and Laurel Valley communities.

How can you get rid of *Miscanthus*?

- Roots can be dug up from the ground and destroyed.
- Repeated mowing, more than four times a year, may kill it after a few years.
- Cattle will graze the young grass if it is kept mowed.
- Herbicide sprays such as imazapyr or glyphosate can be applied during the growing season. Treatments may be more effective if applied for several years.
- A variety of methods may be necessary for long-term control of *Miscanthus*.

Fire will NOT kill *Miscanthus*. Because of its large root systems, burning off a *Miscanthus* patch will not kill it, even during the growing season. Fire almost always encourages it, while killing off any competing vegetation.



Remember: “Where *Miscanthus* grows... FIRE follows!”

Miscanthus can burn almost any time of year on almost any day, even in the snow!

The North Carolina Forest Service strives serves the people of North Carolina by protecting, managing and developing forest resources across the state. N.C. Forest Service county rangers assist landowners with advice, guidance, and cost share assistance for forest management projects that improve existing forests and start new ones.



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