

Purple Pampas Grass

Cortaderia jubata

Progressive Control Plant under the West Coast Regional Pest Plant Management Strategy



Photo from Phil Bendle

National Pest Plant Accord Status

Purple Pampas is listed in the 2008 National Pest Plant Accord (NPPA) and banned from sale, propagation and distribution in New Zealand. For more information refer to the MAF Biosecurity New Zealand website at www.biosecurity.govt.nz/nppa The same applies to its relative, White or Common Pampas.

Where has Purple Pampas come from?

Purple Pampas is native to South America, particularly the Argentinian 'pampas' or plains. An erect, robust plant, it was introduced into New Zealand as both a garden plant and for farm shelter belts. It naturalised quickly and can be found, along with White Pampas, in many parts of the country. It grows well on the West Coast but is still at a point where intervention could prevent it spreading widely, particularly along the Coast Road between Greymouth and Westport.

What does Purple Pampas look like?

Purple Pampas is a tall, erect, tussock-forming perennial grass growing 2-3m high. The leaves are abrasive to touch and dark green with a conspicuous mid-rib (and no secondary ribs, unlike the native toetoe). Tall, hollow flower stems, hairy at the base and standing 3m high, carry erect, fluffy, purple flower heads (which fade to dull brown) from January to March. This is followed by prolific seeding which can be spread up to 20km downwind. Purple Pampas will grow in a wide range of soil types and climate conditions and colonisation can be rapid on disturbed ground, e.g. slips, roadsides, cuttings and in forest light gaps.



Why is Purple Pampas a Pest Plant?

Purple Pampas is a hardy, highly invasive grass which can form dense stands of large tussocks and replace native vegetation over a range of habitats, particularly in coastal areas. It favours disturbed ground along streams and road/rail corridors where it can establish quickly to the detriment of slower growing native species.

The plant has the potential to become a real problem in plantation areas where it can proliferate post harvest then compete with any new trees planted. Purple Pampas can also be a fire hazard as the tussock dries out and drops grass. However fire does not usually kill the plants and they will regenerate readily where other plants do not. The area around the base of the tussocks can also harbour mice, rats and possums.

Purple Pampas is an acknowledged shelter belt plant but there are also good native alternatives such as flax and toetoe (*drooping light yellow flowerheads September to January*) which do not have pest plant characteristics.

*Top right: Purple and Common Pampas [P Bendle]
At left: Purple Pampas in situ [Piha Website]*

What are the best methods of control?

A range of control methods is outlined below and depending on the infestations site and extent, one or more of these should eradicate unwanted plants. Always wear gloves and protective clothing when dealing with Purple Pampas as the leaves can inflict nasty cuts.

Manual Methods

For small or individual plants cut off any flowering heads (to prevent seeding) and dispose of to lined landfill. Then dig or grub out the rest of the tussock. Let plant material dry off and either burn it or let it rot down. Very large tussocks, or stands of them, can also be dug out with a digger. Check sites regularly for any new seedlings or re-growth. Cattle could be used to graze any new or re-growth.

Herbicide Methods

The optimum time for spraying is in the spring - early summer, prior to flowering but when the plants are growing strongly. The two main spray methods are:

- Stump-swabbing: slash the plants down over winter and allow to re-generate in spring before spraying. Weedwipe with a glyphosate based product (e.g. Glyphosate 360, Roundup G2, Trounce, Renew) at a rate of 200ml/1L water + 2mls penetrant.
- Spraying: spray all plants thoroughly using a handgun or knapsack sprayer with either: an haloxyfop based product (e.g. Gallant NF, Ignite) at a rate of 150ml/10L water + 50mls crop oil OR a glyphosate product (as above) at a rate of 100mls/10L water + 20ms penetrant.

Check sites regularly for any re-growth or new plants and apply further controls as needed. To prevent other weeds taking hold, re-sow with pasture grass or plant other species.

For personal safety please use all herbicides as per manufacturer's labelling

Biocontrols

There are no known biocontrols for Purple Pampas as of May 2011. However this status may change as a result of research work about to begin at New Zealand Landcare Research in July 2011. For an update on this please contact the WCRC Weedbusters Co-ordinator or see www.landcareresearch.co.nz

Where can I get more help?

For further information call either of the Regional Weedbusters Co-ordinators. They are:

Mary Traves: Environmental Information Officer, West Coast Regional Council (768 0466 or 0508 800 118)

Tom Belton: Technical Support Officer Biosecurity & Weeds, Department of Conservation, West Coast - Tai Poutini Conservancy, Hokitika (03 756 9100)



www.weedbusters.org.nz

The West Coast Regional Council does not accept liability for any advice given on this sheet regarding application of herbicides for pest plant control. The brand names listed imply neither endorsement of those brands, nor criticism of any other brands not listed.