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Space Invaders - Chinese Silver Grass

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Be Cautious When It Comes to Planting Chinese Silver Grass!



All photos: USDA

Chinese Silver grass, *Miscanthus sinensis* Andersson, is another of those non-native ornamentals that has taken hold across Canada and the lower 48 states, especially in Eastern US, California, and Colorado. This perennial was introduced from Asia in the late 1800s for its pleasing pink and reddish or silvery fans that become tan in late fall and last through winter, with dried grass being replaced by new growth each spring. It is still used ornamentally and as a barrier plant between roads and agricultural fields; the newest cultivars are considered “mostly sterile” (<http://www.invasive.org/weedus/subject.html?sub=3052#pubs>). It can be identified by the whitish or silvery midrib on its long (18 inch) leaves. While generally 5 to 10 feet in height, it can grow up to 12 feet tall.

Chinese Silver grass is known by several other names, including zebra grass, Eulalia grass, Chinese plume grass, and Chinese fairy grass. It is a type of bunch grass, forming clumps of dense grass along



roadsides, forest edges, fields, and disturbed areas. While it can grow from its rough, twisted seeds, Silver grass is primarily spread through rhizomes, or underground roots. It threatens native vegetation, which it displaces, and is a fire hazard because of its extreme flammability. The flame height of burning Chinese Silver grass can reach 30 feet, making it easy to ignite other nearby vegetation and structures. It will tolerate a range of conditions, thriving in relative cold (Zone 5) as well as warm climates (Zone 9). It prefers well-drained, moist soil but does not tolerate shade.

Control. Europe and Asia are taking advantage of it to produce biofuel and paper pulp. The rest of us are still battling to keep it from taking over. If you are like me, you’ve discovered the hard way that hand-pulling absolutely does not work. Silver grass is able to re-grow from root fragments and finding all of those fragments is a challenge because of its extensive root system.

So, what to do if you have some out-of-control *Miscanthus*? According to the Southeast Exotic Pest Plant Council:

“For herbicidal controls to be effective the plants must be actively growing. Glyphosate has been shown to be effective in controlling *miscanthus*. A 2% solution of glyphosate thoroughly mixed with water is effective in the fall or late spring. Treatments should cover the leaves of the plants to the point of runoff.

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Since glyphosate is a non-selective herbicide, it will affect any plant it comes into contact with. For large infestations such as fields or along roadsides, apply glyphosate at a rate of 1.0-1.5 quarts per acre. Use a non-ionic surfactant according to manufacturer's instructions to improve effectiveness." (*SEPPC content is available for non-profit, educational use*)

Other sources recommend September or October for best control, with multiple treatments. Be sure to thoroughly wet all leaves with the herbicide-water-surfactant solution. A surfactant is an agent that reduced surface tension so that the chemicals will adhere rather than roll off the plant. One example is household detergent.

Sources:

- <https://www.invasiveplantatlas.org/subject.html?sub=3052>
 - <https://plants.usda.gov/core/profile?symbol=MISI>
 - https://wiki.bugwood.org/Archive:SEPPC/Chinese_Silver_grass_-_Miscanthus_sinensis_Anderss.
 - *Miller, James H. 2003.* "Nonnative invasive plants of southern forests: a field guide for identification and control". Gen. Tech. Rep. SRS-62. Asheville, NC: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, Southern Research Station. 93 p.
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 - Southeast Exotic Pest Plant Council. 1996. "*Invasive exotic pest plants in Tennessee*" (19 October 1999). Research Committee of the Tennessee Exotic Pest
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