

Cenchrus setaceus

COMMON NAME

African fountain grass

SYNONYMS

Pennisetum setaceum Chiov.

FAMILY

Poaceae

AUTHORITY

Cenchrus setaceus (Forssk.) Morrone

FLORA CATEGORY

Vascular – Exotic

STRUCTURAL CLASS

Grasses

CONSERVATION STATUS

Not applicable

HABITAT

Terrestrial.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Thickly-tufted perennials to 100cm, light green at base with narrow inrolled leaves; branching intravaginal. **Sheath** rounded or slightly keeled above, subcoriaceous, margins long-ciliate. **Ligule** 0.3–0.7 mm, a membranous densely ciliate rim. **Collar hairs** to 2.5 mm. **Blade** 15–30 cm × 0.5–1.5 mm., stiff, folded or involute, long-tapering, adaxially very scabrid; margins especially with a few scattered long hairs, tip filiform, acute. **Culm** 30–45cm, erect, internodes with many finely scabrid ridges. **Panicle** 8.5–20 cm, narrow-cylindric, dense, spike-like, often tinged reddish-purple; rachis hairs short, soft. **Spikelets** 5–6mm, lanceolate, acute, pale green to purple, solitary or in clusters of 2–3 on ciliate pedicels to 3 mm; involucre of numerous plumose, fine unequal bristles, one longer but not stouter bristle to 35 mm. **Lower glume** a hyaline scale to 1 mm or 0. Upper glume 2–2.5 mm, 1-nerved, hyaline, minutely scabrid. **Lower floret** male or sterile; lemma 4.5–5 mm, 3-nerved, membranous, nerves minutely scaberulous near tip; palea = lemma, hyaline, rounded, keeled near tip, minutely scaberulous, or palea 0; anthers 2–3 mm or 0. **Upper floret** hermaphrodite; lemma 5.5–6 mm, 5-nerved, membranous, nerves scaberulous near mucronate tip; palea 4.5–5mm, hyaline, keels scarcely scaberulous near tip; lodicules 0.3–0.4 mm; anthers 2–3 mm; styles connate, stigmas free; caryopsis approx. 3 × 1.2 mm (Edgar & Connor, 2000).

LIFE CYCLE

Perennial. All utilize the C4 photosynthetic pathway and are +/- winter dormant. Apomictic (asexual reproduction where embryos develop without fertilization) and to a smaller degree, out-crossing. Pollination is required for apomictic seed development. Seeds of crimson fountaingrass and feathertop require several months (fall through early to mid-spring) to mature. Flower heads typically remain intact during this period. Most seeds germinate late spring through early summer. Spikelets with bristles disperse in late spring with wind, water, human activities, and by clinging to animals.

YEAR NATURALISED

1982



Pennisetum setaceum. Photographer: Auckland Regional Council, Licence: Public domain.



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ORIGIN

W asia - N Africa

REASON FOR INTRODUCTION

Ornamental.

ETYMOLOGY

cenchrus: From the Greek cenchros which means millet

NATIONAL PEST PLANT ACCORD SPECIES

This plant is listed in the 2020 National Pest Plant Accord. The National Pest Plant Accord (NPPA) is an agreement to prevent the sale and/or distribution of specified pest plants where either formal or casual horticultural trade is the most significant way of spreading the plant in New Zealand. For up to date information and an electronic copy of the 2020 Pest Plant Accord manual (including plant information and images) visit the [MPI website](#).

REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

Edgar E, Connor HE. 2000. Flora of New Zealand. Vol. V. Grasses. Manaaki Whenua Press, Christchurch, NZ. 650 p.

MORE INFORMATION

<https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/cenchrus-setaceus/>