

# Chinese Silver Grass

## *Miscanthus sinensis*

**Introduction:** Chinese Silver Grass (*Miscanthus sinensis*) is a popular ornamental grass native to eastern Asia – throughout most of China, Japan and Korea. There are many varieties, in particular *pupurascens* and subspecies *condensatus* are considered invasive.

**Description:** This grass grows in dense, bushy, upright, and arching clumps. The leaves are long and slender, upright-to-arching, with silvery midribs (the strengthened vein down the middle of a flower petal or leaf). The leaves have sharp tips and rough margin. The terminal panicle is fan-shaped, long and silvery. The silver color usually turns to pink in autumn. Flowers are terminal panicles, which usually grow 10 to 35 centimeters long. Initially they are pale pink to reddish in color, gradually turning tan in fall and last through the winter. Flowers emerge from September to November. Seeds are rough with a twisted bristle tip and range from 3 to 4 millimeters long.

**Habitat:** This species is associated with disturbance and can invade roadsides, riparian areas, in old fields, shores of reservoirs and forest edges.

**Distribution:** Chinese silver grass is invasive throughout the Eastern United states and is listed as potentially invasive in Connecticut. In Oregon, it has been observed invading riparian areas in the south Water Front Park in Portland.

**Reproduction and Dispersal:** *Miscanthus* spreads primarily by underground roots or rhizomes. A rhizome is an underground, horizontal stem of a plant that often send out roots and shoots from its nodes. This allows the specimen to spread quickly and to a great area, without much disruption. Silver Grass can also spread by seed, but its main form of reproduction is actually vegetative.



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**Threats/Impacts:** *Miscanthus* is very aggressive, and may form colonies and produce a large number of airborne seeds. Colonies can also produce many rhizomes and take over an area. This problem is of elevated concern because *Miscanthus* is considered a wildland fire hazard, due to its large amount of dried biomass in the fall and winter. Burning plants can have flame lengths of thirty feet, and have been known to cause a lot of damage.

**Early Detection and Prevention:** Please help prevent the invasion of Chinese silver grass by using native alternatives (see below) and looking for and reporting populations that have escaped from gardens. In Oregon, report this plant by calling 1-866-INVADER.

**Management Information:** The good news is that it can be controlled. As Bowman's Hill Wildflowers Preserve recommends,

"Refrain from putting this plant in the landscape. Instead, use native ornamental grasses such as blue switchgrass (*Panicum virgatum*, 'Heavy Metal'), prairie dropseed (*Sporobolus heterolepis*) and tufted hair grass (*Deschampsia cespitosa*). Spot treatment with a glyphosate herbicide, such as Roundup, in spring when the new shoots are 4" to 6" tall, is effective. Follow label directions when applying any herbicide. This treatment may be continued periodically until flowering. Since *Miscanthus* spreads by rhizomes, be sure to spot treat new shoots arising from the base of the plant."

### References:

Bowman's Hill Wildflowers Preserve  
<http://www.bhwp.org/>

USDA Plants Database  
<http://plants.usda.gov/java/profile?symbol=MISI>

Southeast Exotic Pest Council  
<http://www.invasive.org/eastern/eppc/MISI.html>

\*This fact sheet was reformatted from one written by a McMinnville High School student, for the Western Invasive Network, as part of the *Partners in Prevention* program. It was reviewed by reviewed by Angie Kimpo, Natural Resource Scientist, Metro Parks and Green Spaces, Portland, OR.