



Invasive Plants in Pennsylvania

Chinese Silvergrass

Miscanthus sinensis Anders.



Photo: James Miller, USDA Forest Service,
www.invasive.org

Background:

This grass was brought to the U.S. from Asia in the late 1800s as an ornamental landscape plant. It is also referred to as Eulalia, zebra grass and *Miscanthus*. Some cultivars of this plant are being used as a biofuel crop.

Range:

It can be found throughout the eastern U.S., Colorado and California. There is a large population along the PA Turnpike near Valley Forge.

Description:

Growing up to 12 feet tall, this densely-bunched grass grows upright with silvery midveins on the leaves. The flowering stalks can reach 15 feet or more in length and contain numerous bristled seeds (*see photo below*).



Photo: Chris Evans, River to River CWMA,
www.invasive.org

Habitat:

This grass will grow many places but prefers well-drained soils and full sun to reach maximum height. It is common on old home sites but also found along roadsides, old fields and forest edges.

Biology and Spread:

This species spreads primarily through its vigorous roots and rhizomes. The viability of its seeds is in question.

Ecological Threat:

Chinese silvergrass can escape from landscape plantings into natural areas, particularly disturbed sites, where it displaces native vegetation. It is extremely flammable, so the risk of wildfires increases in areas with this grass.

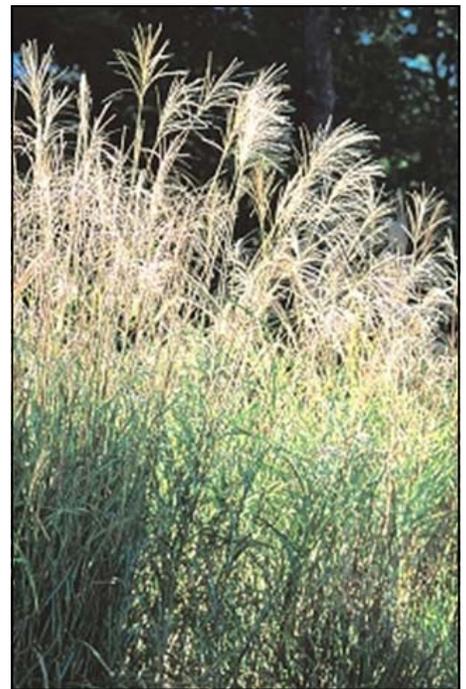


Photo: James Miller, USDA Forest Service,
www.invasive.org

How to Control this Species:

Manual control of this species is NOT recommended. Digging out the plants will most likely result in re-sprouts because of the abundant rhizomes.

Chinese silvergrass can be effectively controlled with several readily available herbicides such as a two-percent solution of glyphosate in water during the fall or a four-percent solution in the late spring. Be sure to follow the label and all state herbicide requirements.

Look-A-Likes:

Our native big bluestem grass (*Andropogon gerardii*) may be confused with Chinese silvergrass due to its large size. Big bluestem's distinguishing feature is the three-prong flower spike that looks like a turkey's foot (see photo below). Sugarcane plumegrass (*Saccharum giganteum*) is another look-a-like.



Photo: Chris Evans, River to River CWMA, www.forestryimages.org

Native Alternatives:

There are no native species of *Miscanthus* in the eastern U.S. but there are several native warm season grasses that can be used for landscaping, including:

Switchgrass (*Panicum virgatum*)



Photo: James Miller & Ted Bodner, Southern Weed Science Society, www.forestryimages.org

References:

Center for Invasive Species and Ecosystem Health:

<http://www.invasive.org/browse/subinfo.cfm?sub=3052>

Invasive Exotic Plant Tutorial for Natural Lands Managers: <http://www.dcnr.state.pa.us/forestry/invasivetutorial/miscanthus.htm>

USDA Forest Service Weed of the Week factsheet:

http://www.na.fs.fed.us/fhp/invasive_plants/weeds/chinese-silvergrass.pdf

For More Information:

To learn more about invasive plants in Pennsylvania, here are some other useful resources:

Plant Invaders of Mid-Atlantic Natural Areas, National Park Service:

<http://www.nps.gov/plants/alien/pubs/midatlantic/midatlantic.pdf>

Invasive Plants Field and Reference Guide, U.S. Forest Service:

http://na.fs.fed.us/pubs/misc/ip/ip_field_guide.pdf