

GREEN GONE BAD

Featured Ornamental Plant: *Cortaderia selloana* (Uruguayan Pampas Grass)

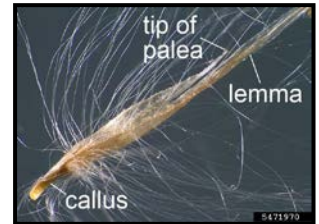
Some exotic ornamental plants behave badly when they escape from the place they are planted. Infestations of these plants have negative impacts on natural environments. One of these plants is *Cortaderia selloana*; common name: Pampas Grass.



Cortaderia selloana is native to Argentina, Brazil, and Uruguay and was introduced into the United States as an ornamental plant and for erosion control. *Cortaderia selloana* is known by several common names including Uruguayan pampas grass, pampas grass, and silver pampas grass.

Cortaderia selloana is a perennial in the grass family (Poaceae) growing 6 to 13 feet in height. Leaf blades are 6 feet long and 1-3 inches wide, V-shaped in cross-section, and bluish green in color. The upper surface is smooth at base and the lower surface is smooth or hairy towards collar. Tips are bristly and curled. Margins are scabrous (rough) and sharp. Inflorescence consists of dense, feathery, 1-4 feet, stiff, light violet to silvery white panicles. Lateral roots can spread to 13 feet in diameter and 11½ feet in depth.

Cortaderia selloana reproduces by seed. Seeds are primarily wind-dispersed and are capable of dispersal distances up to 20 miles. Female seeds have long fine hairs on the lemma making it ideal for wind dispersal. Female plants are capable of producing up to 100,000 seeds per flower head. Due to the fact that pampas grass can live over a decade, it has become a favorable plant to grow in gardens.



Cortaderia selloana has become extremely invasive in California and Texas.

It is currently listed as an "Alert" species by the SC Exotic Pest Plant Council, and is listed as species "Not to be Used or Recommended for Ornamental, Landscapes, Food/Herbal Plantings, or Water Gardens" in A Management Guide for Invasive Plants in Southern Forests by James Miller, Steven T. Manning, and Stephen Enloe. *Cortaderia selloana* can spread easily, displace other desired vegetation, and is difficult to remove. This plant can spread along sandy, moist ditch banks. It requires sandy soils, ample moisture, and sunny locations. It tolerates warm summer temperatures, intense sunlight, and moderate drought, and frost and is therefore very efficient at establishing in many habitat types. The vigorous growth habit and large size can be invasive in natural ecosystems. Populations have escaped cultivation. Vegetative reproduction can occur when root fragments develop shoots at the base of the plant. Once established, roots of a single plant can occupy a soil area of about 1,100 square feet. Dr. James Miller stated, "These plants are extremely invasive in semi-arid regions after they enter drainages, but have less invasive potential in the forested east." Escaped plants are present in South Carolina and are typically found in open fallow fields and disturbed areas near urban landscapes, but have also been observed within higher quality habitats such as longleaf pine understory where an invasion would be detrimental to many species of native wildlife.



Other *Cortaderia selloana* problems—homeowners complain of extreme invasiveness and persistence, painful interactions with the foliage (cuts and allergic reaction), invasion of foliage over walkways and into air conditioning units, difficult removal, problematic seed dispersal (long fine hairs on the lemma cause the seeds to land in a fuzzy carpet over everything, get sucked into water pumps, and clog pool filters).



Many horticulturists, landscapers, homeowners and biologists have noticed this species spreading. Please be cautious of planting potentially harmful invasive plants. This species is not yet a major problem in SC and may not become one with less usage. There are many large and attractive native grasses that can be planted as alternatives: *Arundinaria gigantea* (Switchcane), *Chasmanthium laxum* (River Oats), *Tripsacum dactyloides* (Eastern Gama Grass), *Panicum virgatum* (Switchgrass), *Spartina bakeri* (Sand Cordgrass), *Eragrostis spectabilis* (Purple Lovegrass), *Muhlenbergia capillaris* (Sweetgrass or Muhly Grass), *Eragrostis elliottii* (Sand Lovegrass or Blue Eros), *Sorghastrum nutans* (Indiangrass, the SC State Grass).



Visit these web pages for more details: <http://www.invasiveplantatlas.org/subject.html?sub=5381>
http://www.na.fs.fed.us/fhp/invasive_plants/weeds/uruguayan-pampas-grass.pdf (includes control methods)
<http://www.treesearch.fs.fed.us/pubs/36915> (A Management Guide for Invasive Plants in Southern Forests)
http://www.texasinvasives.org/plant_database/detail.php?symbol=COSE4
<https://www.dfg.ca.gov/habcon/plant/dontplantme/cortaderia.html>

See also: <http://www.se-eppc.org/southcarolina/> and <http://www.se-eppc.org/>

