

Torpedo Grass

By Deborah Birge, Fort Bend Master Gardener

Q: What is torpedo grass and what do you do about it?

From Deborah Birge, Fort Bend County Master Gardener

There is a new invasive grass/weed in the area. It's called Torpedo grass (*Panicum repens*), creeping panic, panic rampant, couch panicum, wainaku grass, quack grass, dog-tooth grass, or bullet grass. I particularly like creeping panic since that is what one feels upon finding a healthy growth of this grass in their lawn. It is present in many places as an introduced species and often a noxious weed. It has been called "one of the world's worst weeds."¹



Torpedo grass was introduced to the US in approximately 1876 as a forage grass. It can grow up to 3 feet tall on long, strong rhizomes. It has been noted to grow 1.3 centimeters or 0.51 inches in length per day. It enjoys sun or shade, soil or water. It can withstand grazing cattle, floods, drought and fire. It can be made into hay or used to stop erosion. But, it's almost impossible to destroy.



When hand-pulling or mowing, the rhizomes can break apart. As a portion falls to the ground, it will sprout roots and anchor itself. The plant survives and sprouts after herbicide application, grazing, cutting, plowing or disking, and burning. The grass rarely reproduces by seed.²

Eliminating torpedo grass in the lawn is a tricky business, requiring tenacity and usually multiple chemical applications. The weed is nearly indestructible and has been known to come out through weed barrier fabric.³ There has been some success using the chemicals glyphosate or quinclorac. The problems are that these chemicals will also kill your Bermuda or St. Augustine grass. Although you might start to think this would be a good trade-off, remember that a bare spot in your lawn will attract even more weed seeds.

All recommendations for control have shown unpredictable results. Applications of herbicide must be used repeatedly until the rhizomes are dead. A promising plan is to use a pre-emergent labeled for crabgrass in the fall. In the spring attack the sprouting torpedo grass with glyphosate

or quinclorac. Quinclorac is easier on Bermuda grass than glyphosate. After the rhizomes are dead, re-sod. Always follow label directions when using any chemicals. Monitor your lawn for new eruptions and treat accordingly.

For more information, you can follow this link

<http://www.tsusinvasives.org/home/database/panicum-repens>

Photo credit: Lee Legrand

1. Byrd, J. D. and V. Maddox. Torpedograss (*Panicum repens* L.) Mississippi State University Extension
2. Stone, Katharine R. 2011. *Panicum repens*. In: Fire Effects Information System, [Online]. U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, Rocky Mountain Research Station, Fire Sciences Laboratory
3. Torpedograss Weeds: Tips on Torpedograss Control, Bonnie L. Grant, Certified Urban Agriculturist