

Environmental Horticulture Production Newsletter

FALL EDITION

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Communication Award
Winner 2011
National Finalist
Individual Newsletter

If the web is indeed a place, it is starting to look less like a library, and more like a river."

Peter Da Vanzo

Cogongrass in Nurseries

I was called out to a nursery that was inundated in their ground cover by a grass. The owner let it get out of control and now it is a serious problem. My first question was, "Is the mid-vein offset from the center of the leaf blade?" The answer was yes and it became apparent that we were dealing with cogongrass. I have seen and heard about this invasive grass being at least in four other nurseries and I figured it was time to do an article on it before other owners have the same issue with an out of control problem.

Cogongrass (*Imperata cylindrical*) is becoming more frequently found along roadsides, natural areas, and even plant nurseries. This non-native invasive is causing a

weed management headache for those seeking to control it, especially when it becomes established in production groundcover mats where commercial plants are raised. Vigilance is necessary when managing this aggressive weed threat.

Cogongrass is a perennial grass native to southeast Asia. In Florida, cogongrass infests ditch banks, pastures, road sides/right-of-ways, golf courses, and forests. In central Florida, monocultures of cogongrass have become established on hundreds of acres of reclaimed phosphate mining areas. It thrives on most soil types and does well in soils of low fertility. The leaves are light green, with older leaves turning brown in color. In areas with killing

frosts, the leaves will turn light brown during winter months and present a substantial fire hazard. Cogongrass grows in loose to compact bunches, each 'bunch' containing several leaves arising from a central area along a rhizome. Rhizomatous growth is the main culprit by which cogongrass spreads. A rhizome is the underground root/storage structure of the plant. It can also penetrate to a depth of 4 feet in the soil, although the majority of rhizomes remain in the top 6 inches. The sheer mass and persistence of rhizomes is not the only factor contributing to the ability of cogongrass to dominate an area. It has also been reported that these rhizomes exude *Con't pg. 3*

Extension Helping You-Virtual Marketing

Marketing today is a mix of having a great product and telling about in channels that your buyers are using. Those channels seem to be changing to a direction that is rapidly moving over the Internet. I wanted to help our local plant producers get some experience with internet marketing. I collaborated with Billie Lofland, our award-winning videographer and came up

with a plan to go out around the County and capture on video any Hillsborough County plant producers who would like to take a few minutes to give a tour of their operation, products, and other aspects that viewers on internet might be interested in. I will be placing all these videos in one location online under the heading Hillsborough/Polk County Ornamen-

tal Plant Producers Virtual Tour. This will allow growers to have an online presence when someone is searching for plants in our local area. YouTube streams 4 billion videos to users per day according to Wikipedia! Your farm visit video may be one of them. If you'd like to put a video on the internet call me at 813-744-5519 ext. 54147.

Economic Review and Outlook

Every year in late July, I sit down with the annual Florida labor statistics and my spreadsheets to determine where we have been for the past year in environmental horticulture production. This last year it seems that we produced plants on 3977 acres which was down from 4038 acres in 2010 for a loss of 61 acres, or 1.5%. The overall economic production number was approximately \$139.2 million, down about \$5 million

from the year previous. This represents a loss of about 3.6% of environmental horticulture production in Hillsborough county. Sod acreage dropped 1649 acres or about 42% to an annual production worth about \$7.4 million. How does the near future look? Currently the housing market in Florida is doing better with about 31% less homes for sale than a year ago. There are also about 4000 housing

starts each month which is about double from the bottom of the recession. Consumer confidence is up slightly from the beginning of the year. The US Real Gross Domestic Product or GDP is higher than it was before the peak of the economic downturn. Most importantly, US personal consumption rose \$1 trillion more than before the economic downturn. All these indicators seem to be pointing to a better future.

FNGLA's Plant Auction 2012

The Tampa Chapter FNGLA held their annual BBQ and plant auction at the Hillsborough County fair. This annual auction raises money for the Carl Cowgill student scholarship and other youth activities that the Tampa chapter feels is important to our community. The auction raised about \$4200 to support the ongoing programs. This is about the same as they did the year prior. The Tampa

chapter FNGLA also supported Extension's 4-H youth program by purchasing about 20 dinners for its worker volunteers and plant donors from the Hillsborough County 4-H youth group. The auction drew about 62 plant buyers out to bid on donations from local nurseries and businesses. Last year the FNGLA awarded four

scholarships to local students in agriculture or environmental horticulture with money that was raised primarily from this auction and the FNGLA Golf Tournament.

New Interim Extension Director

The Hillsborough County extension office now is under the leadership of a new interim director. Stephen Gran has taken the helm at the director's position, replacing Debra Jo Kinsella who served as the director for about two years. Ms.

Kinsella left Extension to pursue other interests. Mr. Gran will serve as the interim until a permanent replacement is hired. Mr. Gran continues to serve in his current position as manager for agriculture industry development.



Maskell Scale on Junipers

I was called out to a grower who was having problems on junipers and cedars with lower and interior needles and branches turning brown and dying out. Unfortunately junipers do not let you know that there is a problem until they are dead. We thought at first it was going to be a fungal pathogen but as I took samples and examined them under the microscope, I found the needles covered with a scale I could only make out

with the scope. I sent it to DPI to get it identified and it came back as Maskell scale. It is a very small light brown to gold oyster shaped armored scale (see figure to right). The scale seemed to mostly reside in leaf axils. There were quite a few that were parasitized by an unknown biological (which is why we stress scouting in Integrated Pest Management to preserve our beneficial predators helping us out). This scale can

infest junipers, cryptomeria, arborvitae, and Leyland cypress. For control measures visit the publication entitled Scale Insects and Mealy Bugs on Ornamentals. Here is a link. <http://tiny.cc/scalecontrol>



Maskell scale *Lepidosaphes pallida* on juniper 'blue point' Photograph S.T. Steed

Extension Calendar

Oct. 29—Nov. 8, 2012—Ag-Venture State Fair-gorunds

Nov. 13, 2012-TBWG Meeting J&R Nursery

Nov. 19, 2012 –SW FL Small Farm Network Meeting– Mother’s Organics, Seffner

Nov. 27 & 28-Mandatory Meetings for Youth Plant Show, Plant City and East Bay HS.

Nov 30, 2012,- Great Southern Tree Conf. Gainesville.

Feb. 28– Mar.1, 2012–TBWG Spring Expo Tampa, FL

Check out the cogongrass factsheet by clicking this link. <http://tiny.cc/cogongrass>

Cogongrass continued

detrimental substances which inhibit growth of other plants. If the area is under nursery production then either imazethpyr or glyphosate are the chemicals that can be used. Treat cogongrass in the fall while the leaves are still green. Thoroughly wet the leaves with glyphosate (2% solution, 8 oz. of product per 3 gallon mix) or imazapyr (1%

solution, 4 oz. product per 3 gallon mix), or a combination of these herbicides. Always include a surfactant to improve herbicide absorption by the cogongrass foliage. Dr. Andrew MacRae (UF/IFAS Weed Scientist, Southwest Florida Research and Education Center) recommends that possibly higher rates of glyphosate may need to be

used to achieve burn down of this weed. Resprouting will occur and again chemical treatment should be used repeatedly until there are no more underground rhizome shoots. For more information read my factsheet.





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Winter Climate Prediction 2012

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric and Administration Climate Prediction Center is forecasting a neutral to a slight El Nino weather pattern this year. Which means slightly cooler temperatures for the fall and winter and a wetter than normal winter. Although this may change and the climate pattern is not very strong for that region of the Pacific. Still it is a good idea to be prepared for those possibilities. Plants might be slower to make the Spring selling season. Adjust for that by considering fertilizer inputs, temperature modifica-

tions and stocking rates and times. Maybe prepare a little earlier for buttoning up greenhouses. For more information on this topic and how the climate can affect your crops visit my past article on El Nino

<http://hort-agent.blogspot.com/2009/08/el-nino-is-back.html>

Check out the forecast maps from NOAA Climate Prediction Center. Just remember climate forecasts are still a prediction; similar to economic forecasting.

