FACTSHEETS FOR FARMERS

Created in Kenya, February 2016



Digitaria abyssinica

Recognize the problem

Family: Poaceae (grass family).

Common names: couchgrass, blue couchgrass, African couchgrass, Abyssinian fingergrass, Dunn's finger grass, couch finger grass.

Kiswahili: Sangari; Amharic: Urra; French: Chiendent; Kinyarwanda: Urwiri; Luanda: Lumbugu.

Perennial, creeping grass with long, slender, branching rhizomes which form a dense mat beneath the soil surface; rhizomes can go deeper than 1m. Flowering stems lying on the ground at the base, rising at the tip to 0.5-1 m high.

Leaves: Often bluish green; blade flat, up to 15 cm long and 2-8 mm wide.

Inflorescence: Branched with 2 to 25 upwardly pointing, 2-11cm long flower heads ('branches'), which are alternate along a 1-9 cm long central axis.

Background

Origin: Native to tropical Africa.

Introduction: Unknown. Present in most African and some Asian countries.

Habitat: Humid tropical regions; grows from sea level to 2900 m, particularly in more humid regions; grows on a wide range of soils.

Spread: By seeds; as contaminant of crop seeds, fragmented rhizomes may be spread with soil and machinery.

Invades: Many crops, including large grain and small grain cereals (maize, sorghum, rice, millet, wheat, barley), fibres (cotton, flax and sisal), tree crops (coffee, forestry nurseries, tea and wattle) and plantation crops including pineapple, pyrethrum and sugarcane.

Impact: *Digitaria abyssinica* is considered one of the most troublesome crop weeds in Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania. It is reported as the most important weed of coffee in Kenya and of cotton in Uganda. The growth and yield of crops is greatly reduced in the presence of the weed. Heavy infestations can kill coffee bushes, reduce sisal yields by 2 t/ha and cotton yields by 50%. This may be caused, in part, by toxins released from the roots of the weed which have a detrimental effect on the crop. Serious mechanical damage to crops can occur when trying to remove rhizomes entwined in crop roots. Where present in high densities, ploughing with draught animals is impeded; injury can be caused to the shoulders of the animals due to increased traction.

Scientific name(s) > Digitaria abyssinica

The recommendations in this factsheet are relevant to: All Countries



Authors: CABI. Edited by participants from Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda and Uganda at a workshop in Nairobi, February 2016. CABI tel: +254 (0)20 2271000 email: africa@cabi.org East African couchgrass. (Photo by © Forest and Kim Starr)



Close-up of flower head. (Photo by ©Frits van Oudtshoorn)



Edited by Plantwise.