

# Pennisetum setaceum

## Crimson fountaingrass

*Pennisetum setaceum* (Forssk.) Chiov.  
Syn. *P. ruppelii*

Family: Poaceae

**Description:** Dense bunchgrass to 4 ft tall. Leaves narrow, stiff, rough, 2 ft long. Sheaths 6 inches long, hairy at throat. Ligules consist of a dense row of hairs. Inflorescences dense, pink or purple, cylindrical panicles. Latin *setaceum*, bristles<sup>(70)</sup>.

**Distribution:** Originally from northern Africa, fountaingrass is used as an ornamental and for dune stabilization in the U.S. Southwest. Adapted to harsh conditions, it thrives on unweathered lava flows, exposed subsoil, fire-prone areas, and droughty climatic zones. Dense infestations are found in the South Kohala-Kona Coast area of Hawai'i, where it was first introduced as an ornamental, but it is spreading all over the island and covers over 200,000 acres. It has also been found on Kaua'i (controlled), O'ahu (< 200 acres), Maui (> 1 acre), Moloka'i (controlled), Lana'i (5 acres) and Kaho'olawe (controlled)<sup>(4, 70)</sup>. Commonly mistaken for pilgrass (*Heteropogon contortus* (L.) P. Beauv. ex Roem. & Schult.), but there is no real resemblance; fountaingrass was collected as pilgrass in Kona and shipped to Kaua'i and Maui and used briefly as thatch to shade outdoor tables in hotels.



**Environmental impact:** Unpalatable to cattle except for young shoots. Forms dense stands. A wildfire hazard, it is the main fuel for perennial wildfires in West Hawai'i.

**Management:** Sensitive to glyphosate applied by spraying and by the drizzle method. HAVO staff reported control with hexazinone at 10–20% of liquid concentrate applied to wet the green foliage (Chris Zimmer, HAVO). The only practical management is probably by intensive grazing management in pastures and perhaps by replanting trees in dryland forests.