

## **Smutgrass** (*Sporobolus indicus*, *Sporobolus jacquemontii*)

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Smutgrass is an invasive bunchgrass native to Asia. This grass ranks as the second most problematic weed in perennial improved pastures in Florida. Two species of smutgrass are found in Florida: small smutgrass (*S. indicus*) and giant smutgrass (*S. jacquemontii*). In South Florida, giant smutgrass is the most predominant weed species of the two and continues to expand its range to the north.



*Pictures: Smutgrass clump and seed heads. Picture credit: Jonael Bosques, UF/IFAS Extension Hardee County.*

Mature smutgrass plants are unpalatable to livestock, but some grazing of mature smutgrass does occur. New regrowth of smutgrass, similar in quality to that of bahiagrass, is grazed for two to three weeks after burning or mowing. However, it is difficult to graze cattle on smutgrass due to the need to rotate cattle among smutgrass-infested paddocks so that growth of the smutgrass does not reach a stage where cattle will not graze the plants.

Seed production of both species occurs throughout the growing season, and new seedheads are produced shortly after mowing or burning. The seeds, which are red to orange in color, remain attached to seedheads for some time after maturing and are spread by adhering to livestock and machinery or by movement via water and wind. Natural seed germination has been shown to average less than 9%, and seed are thought to remain viable in the soil for at least two years

### **Control**

**Hexazinone**- Chemical control of smutgrass includes applying hexazinone at 1.0 lb/acre (Velpar/Tide Hexazinone at 2 qt/acre; Velossa at 1.67 qt/acre) to small and giant smutgrass. A surfactant may be added to Velpar (Velossa contains a surfactant), but recent research has indicated that a surfactant is not necessary since the herbicide works primarily by root uptake.

### **Bahiagrass/Bermudagrass Pastures**

- Graze pasture in the spring until the beginning of the rainy season.
- Apply 2.0 qt/acre Velpar/Tide Hexazinone (1.67 qt/acre Velossa) during the summer rainy season but not later than the end of September. Apply when plants are actively growing, and rainfall is dependable and consistent.
- Fertilization after hexazinone application will increase forage production and allow the desirable grass to quickly fill the open areas created by dying smutgrass.

\* Hexazinone is not labeled for use in Limpograss, Stargrass or Mulato pastures.

**Glyphosate** – Spot spray clumps in pasture with 4 qt/acre glyphosate. Use this same rate when renovating a heavily infested pasture where smutgrass covers 70%-80% of the plant population. Scout the pasture one year after renovation and apply hexazinone at 0.5 lb/acre for suppression and control of smutgrass seedlings.

### **Further Reading:**

Smutgrass Control in Perennial Grass Pastures - <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/aa261>

Weed Management in Pastures and Rangeland - <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/wg006>

Forage Planting and Establishment Methods on Prepared Seedbed - <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/ag107>