

Johnson grass (*Sorghum halepense*)



Can stand up to 3 m tall



Seedlings resemble maize

Johnson grass is a perennial, summer-growing grass up to 3 m tall. It tolerates a wide range of climatic conditions but grows best in warm, humid areas with summer rainfall. Foliage is killed by frost although the rhizomes will survive.

Seedlings resemble maize. Erect stems grow from the rhizomes. Leaf blades are flat, up to 50 cm long and 0.5 - 2 cm wide, with a prominent midrib on the underside. Johnson grass produces large, pyramidal, purplish flower heads. The seed is oval, dark mahogany to light reddish in colour.

One plant can produce up to 80,000 seeds, which are dispersed by wind, water, animal coats, birds and cattle. They can also pass unharmed through the digestive tracts of animals. The rhizomes also aid local spread.

This plant is extremely rare in New Zealand and poses a huge threat if it ever spreads. It is a notifiable organism and is subject to a MAF eradication programme. All sightings must be reported to MAF's contracted control agency, AgriQuality New Zealand (phone: 0508 00 11 22), who will arrange for its clearance and disposal.