

Weeping Lovegrass ERCU2
Eragrostis curvula (Schrad.) Nees
Synonyms: African lovegrass

From: Miller, James H. and Steve T. Manning. [working title] An Expanded Nonnative Invasive Plants of Southern Forests: A Field Guide for Identification and Control. Asheville, NC: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, Southern Research Station. DRAFT - August 2008

Family: Poaceae

Plant. Densely clumping to up to 2.5 feet (75 cm) tall, perennial, warm-season grass, formed from flattened basally interconnected sprays of long, thin, and wiry basal leaves that arch and droop in all directions almost touching the ground (thus the common name “weeping”). Tall laterally branched flower stalks in early summer to 6 feet (2 m) tall persist with seed having varying fertility during the early winter. Root system is large and fibrous. Evergreen or semi-evergreen in the southern Coastal Plain, while dormant whitish wispy clumps are highly recognizable further north.

Stem (culm). Not apparent except for the flower/seed stalks. Leaves arise from a tightly packed short flattened group of stems hidden in hairy basal sheaths that persist over winter.

Leaves. Thin, less than a quarter of an inch (1 to 4 mm) wide with margins often rolled inward, to several feet (1 m) long and arching over at mid-leaf to almost touch the ground. Originating from tightly packed dense flattened bundles of leaves encased by persistent sheaths, 6 to 12 inches (15 to 30 cm) long, having scattered to dense hairs.

Flowers. June to July. Open spreading panicles, lavender-grey color, 8 to 10 inches (20 to 25 cm) long, on stalks to 6 feet (1.9 meters) tall, with numerous projecting or erect lateral branches being shorter in the upper portion with numerous secondary branchlets that bear stacks of tiny, grayish green, husked flowers.

Seeds. July to November. Husks light tan and the grain reddish-brown, 0.15 to 0.22 inches (4 to 5.5 mm) long, released within the husks.

Ecology. Still widely seeded for soil stabilization along highways, on surface mines, and around businesses and homes; increasingly escaping to dominate native plant communities throughout the U.S. Tolerant to fire, drought (C4 photosynthesis), salinity and bred for cold tolerance. Adapted to a wide range of habitats from moist to dry, hot to cold, and soils that are acid to basic, but prefers well-drained sandy loam soils and will not tolerate standing water. Clumps increase by tillering new plants at the base and infestations increase in density by seed fall. Seed dispersed by water, contaminated equipment and soil, and through planting. Occurs as dense colonies in old fields and along field margins and right-of-ways, where it invades new forest plantations, open forests, forest openings, and special habitats like native prairies. Detrimental to wildlife, especially ground nesting and foraging birds.

Resembles no other grasses due to its unique growth habit of tight clumps of “weeping” long and narrow leaves; while many other species of native and nonnative lovegrass produce similar seed stalks.

History and use. Introduced into the U.S. in 1927 from South Africa and later from Tanzania for erosion control and for forage. Still widely sold and planted as an ornamental and for soil stabilization and forage.