

Picayune Invasive Plant Field Guide

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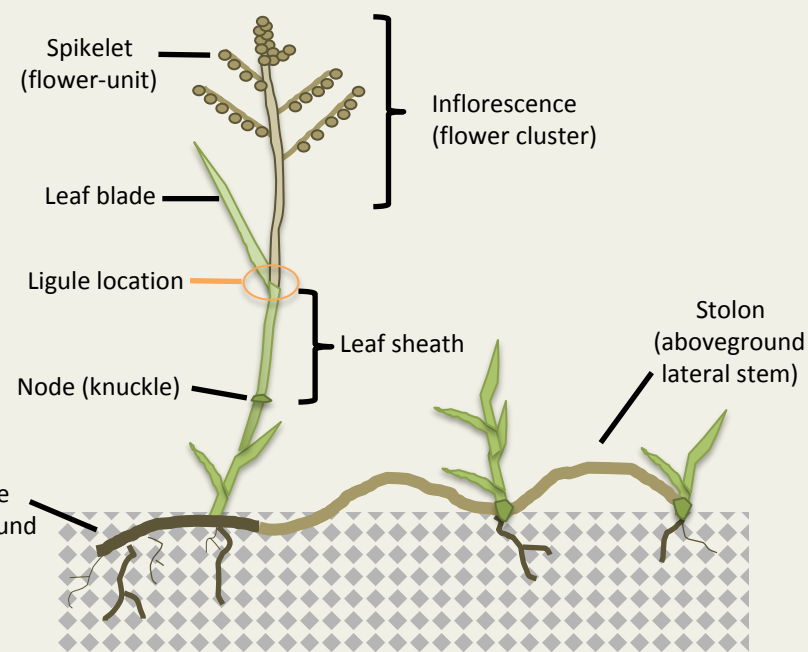
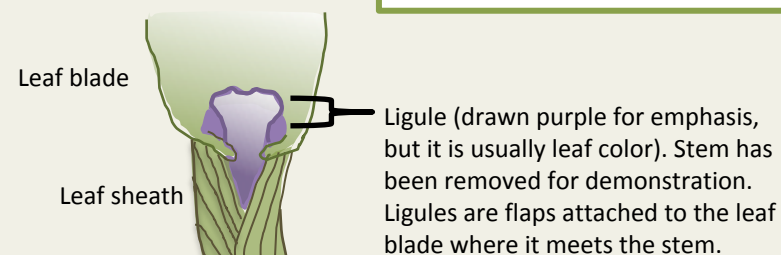
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Part C – Creeping grasses

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C.3	<i>Eremochloa ophiuroides</i>	Centipede grass
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Field Guide Chapters

- Part A Other Grasses
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“Runner” refers to a lateral stem, either rhizome or stolon.

Cynodon dactylon

Bermuda grass

FISC (FLEPPC): Not native.

Plant family: Poaceae (grass family).

Snapshot: Creeping turf grass; mat-forming.

Vegetative recognition: Compared to other creeping grasses, it is generally shorter, with narrower leaves (~1/8 inch wide) and stems. In compacted roadways, can be only a few inches tall; but if growing conditions are good, can be same height at torpedo grass. Ligule is a dense tuft of short hairs.

Flowering recognition: Inflorescence is a group of several finger-like branches radiating from a single point. Much narrower branches than most “finger” grasses.

Flowering period: Spring – fall.

Habitat: Disturbed sites somewhat wet to upland; roads, lawns.

Look-a-likes: *Panicum repens*, “torpedo grass”, invasive, see page C.7 and below.
Paspalum distichum, “fishbone”, native, see below and page C.8.



Bermuda grass

Fishbone
flat stem



Torpedo grass

Bermuda grass



Eremochloa ophiuroides Centipede grass

FISC (FLEPPC): Not native.

Plant family: Poaceae (grass family).

Snapshot: Creeping turf grass with above-ground runner.

Vegetative recognition: Mat-forming grass that generally stays low to ground. Leaf blades are clumped on short flattened stems from runner. Runners are thick. Fast-growing runners can look like fishbone.

Flowering recognition: Small single rod on slender stalk, not much taller than vegetation.

Flowering period: Summer – fall.

Habitat: Somewhat wet pinelands; roadsides, ditches, lawns, hammocks, canal banks.

ID learning location: (2022) along Private Lands Canal (~62nd Ave on either side of Miller Blvd.)

Look-a-likes: *Paspalum distichum*, “fishbone”, native, see page C.8.



Dense leafy shoot resembles a centipede.



Hemarthria altissima

Limpo grass

FISC (FLEPPC): Category II.

Plant family: Poaceae (grass family).

Snapshot: Creeping grass with underground rhizome; mat-forming.

Vegetative recognition: Mat-forming and can have higher clumps of stems (>2 ft) than most creeping grasses. Leaf blades are long, narrow, soft and often droop. Frequently, some leaves are purplish. Leaf blade attachment looks much like fishbone grass with flat stem. Ligule is a membrane with short hairs.

Flowering recognition: Infrequently seen. Has fleshy, pencil-like branches with nubs.

Flowering period: Summer – winter.

Habitat: Wet to very wet, including former canals and spreader basins.

Invasive comments: Seeds float downstream.

Look-a-likes:

Paspalum distichum, “fishbone”, native, see page C.8.

Panicum repens, “torpedo grass”, invasive, see page C.7.

See also page C.10 for leaf comparisons with fishbone and torpedo grass.



Leaves usually droop;
frequently purplish color



Hymenachne amplexicaulis West Indian marshgrass

FISC (FLEPPC): Category I .

Plant family: Poaceae (grass family).

Snapshot: Creeping, then bend upward to 6 ft tall; can form dense stands.

Vegetative recognition: Persists many growing seasons via runners. Horizontal runners root at the nodes (knuckles) and produce robust vertical stems. Stems have white spongy pith. Leaf blade bases clasp the stem with ear-like flaps. Leaf blades are long, tapering, to >12 inches long and >1 inch wide. Leaf blades and sheaths are generally smooth except near sheath/blade junction.

Flowering recognition: Inflorescence is a dense, narrow cluster (resembles a hot dog), to 16 inches long.

Flowering period: Fall.

Habitat: Very wet habitats, ditches, marshes, pop-ash sloughs, willow strands, cypress swamps.

Invasive comments: Seeds float and invade sites downstream.

Look-a-likes: *Panicum hemitomon*, “maidencane”, a desirable native (see next page)

[More photos on next page.](#)



Hymenachne amplexicaulis
West Indian marshgrass

vs.

Panicum hemitomon
Maidencane

Invasive

Very wet habitat

Desirable native

Wet habitat



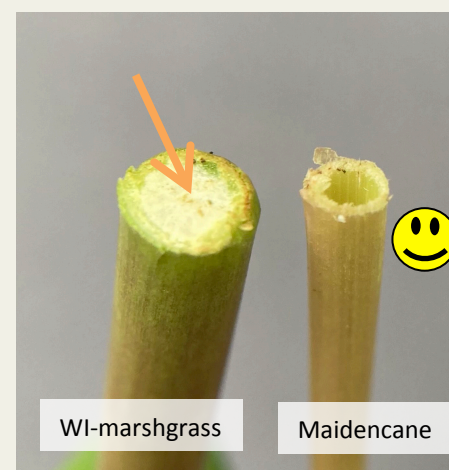
WI-marshgrass

WI-marshgrass
Ear-like leaf base that wraps
around the stem



Maidencane

Maidencane
Leaf base tapers at stem



WI-marshgrass

Maidencane

WI-marshgrass
White spongy
(solid) pith

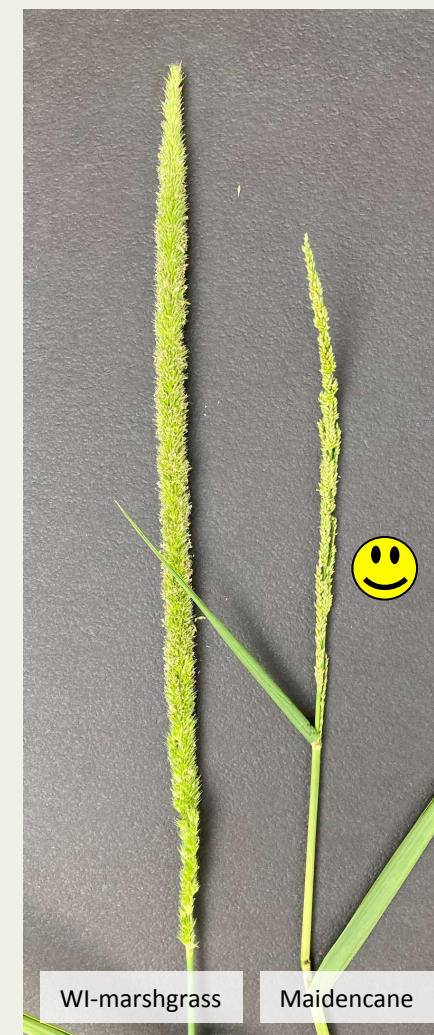
Maidencane
Hollow pith

WI-marshgrass
Stems frequently root at nodes.
Has lateral runners (only visible
after dry-down).

Maidencane
Does not root at nodes.
Stems arise singly from deep
underground rhizome.



WI-marshgrass



WI-marshgrass

Maidencane

Inflorescences for both
species are appressed to the
main stem and they look
similar in the field.

Panicum repens

Torpedo grass

FISC (FLEPPC): Category I.

Plant family: Poaceae (grass family).

Snapshot: Creeping grass with runner that is usually underground.

Vegetative recognition: Persists many seasons via underground stems. Leaves are 2-ranked (on 2 sides of stem), pointy, angled upward. Leaves can have a bright yellow-green color. Ligule is a membrane with a 1 mm fringe.

Flowering recognition: Upright panicle (airy cluster) up to 10 inches tall.

Flowering period: Spring – fall.

Habitat: Wet disturbed sites, ditches, edges of ponds, as well as nearby marshes, flatwoods, swamps.

Look-a-likes: *Paspalum distichum*, “fishbone”, native, see page C.8–10.

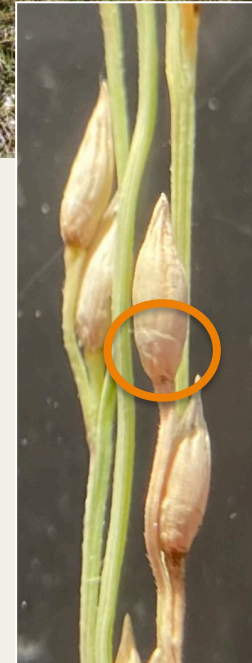
Cynodon dactylon, “bermuda grass”, invasive, see page C.2.

Hemarthria altissima, “limpo grass”, invasive, see page C.4.

[More photos on next page.](#)



Stems arise from underground torpedo runner



Outer bract of spikelet is much shorter and rounder than other bracts

Paspalum distichum

Fishbone grass, torpedo-mimic

DESIRABLE NATIVE 😊

Plant family: Poaceae (grass family).

Snapshot: Creeping grass with above-ground runner.

Vegetative recognition: Leaves are 2-ranked (on only 2 sides of stem), usually deep green, narrow, pointy, & angled upwards. Stem is flattened. Runners turn gold/tan with age. Ligule is a 2mm-long membrane, sometimes with a few long hairs adjacent.

Flowering recognition: Small inflorescence (<4 inches) with 2- or 3-narrow branches.

Flowering period: Summer (fall).

Habitat: Disturbed wet areas including roads, ditches, recently scraped areas. Salt-tolerant; brackish marshes, mudflats, beaches.

Look-a-likes:

Panicum repens, “torpedo grass”, invasive, see page C.7, C.9.

Hemarthria altissima, “limpo grass”, invasive, see page C.4.



More photos on next page.

Paspalum distichum

Fishbone grass

Desirable native

Wet habitat



vs.

Panicum repens

Torpedo grass

Invasive

Wet habitat

Both species grow in the same habitat, and can grow intermingled.

Fishbone stems are flattened. Torpedo stems are round.

Fishbone runners are above ground. Torpedo runners (typically white) are usually below ground, although they sometimes float on the surface.

Both can be top-killed by frost. Fishbone turns brown. Torpedo turns tan.

Fishbone ligule is a 2mm-long membrane, sometimes with a few long hairs adjacent. Torpedo ligule is a membrane with a 1 mm fringe. [need magnification to see ligules]



fishbone



torpedo

Fishbone runners become gold/tan as they age. BUT, torpedo older stems bent over can look like fishbone tan runners



Fishbone runner



Torpedo old bent stems

Compare leaves

Paspalum distichum

Fishbone grass

Desirable native

Wet habitat

vs.

Hemarthria altissima

Limpo grass

Invasive

Wet habitat

vs.

Panicum repens

Torpedo grass

Invasive

Wet habitat



Fishbone leaf blades are very similar to torpedo grass. Fishbone stems are flattened. When fast-growing, leaves have a darker green color than torpedo grass.

Torpedo grass leaf blades are usually stiff, pointing upwards. Stems are not flattened. When fast-growing, leaves have a brighter green color than fishbone.

Limpo grass leaf blades are longer, softer, usually drooping, and can be purplish. Limpo grass can form taller clumps than torpedo or fishbone. Both limpo grass and fishbone have flattened stems.

Paspalum notatum

Bahia grass

FISC (FLEPPC): Not native.

Plant family: Poaceae (grass family).

Snapshot: Turf grass with thick runner just below ground level.

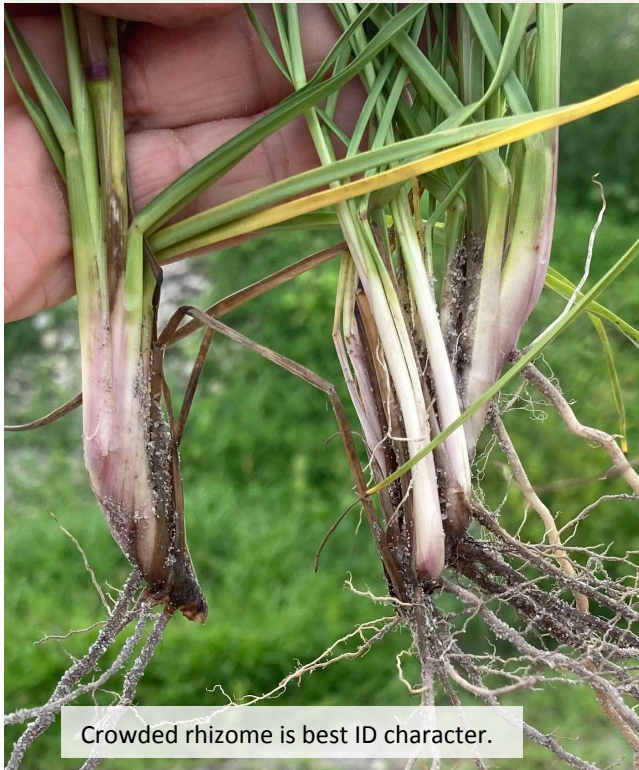
Vegetative recognition: Persists many seasons. Runner (rhizome) underground is thick, well-rooted, and difficult to hand pull. Leafy stem bases (pinkish) are crowded densely on the rhizome. Old leaf bases persist on the rhizome.

Flowering recognition: Inflorescence is Y-shaped (although sometimes has fewer/more branches).

Flowering period: Spring – fall.

Habitat: Pastures, roadsides, disturbed upland sites.

Look-a-likes: There are many other grasses that have a Y-shaped inflorescence.



Crowded rhizome is best ID character.



Stenotaphrum secundatum

St. Augustinegrass



FISC (FLEPPC): Native to Florida, but not “natural” at Picayune (although natural in coastal habitats)

Plant family: Poaceae

Snapshot: Creeping turfgrass with stout above ground runners.

Vegetative recognition: Thick, strong runners between clusters of leaves. Leaf clusters have a wide, flat base (like broomgrass and finger-grass). Left un-mowed, leaf clumps can grow knee-high.

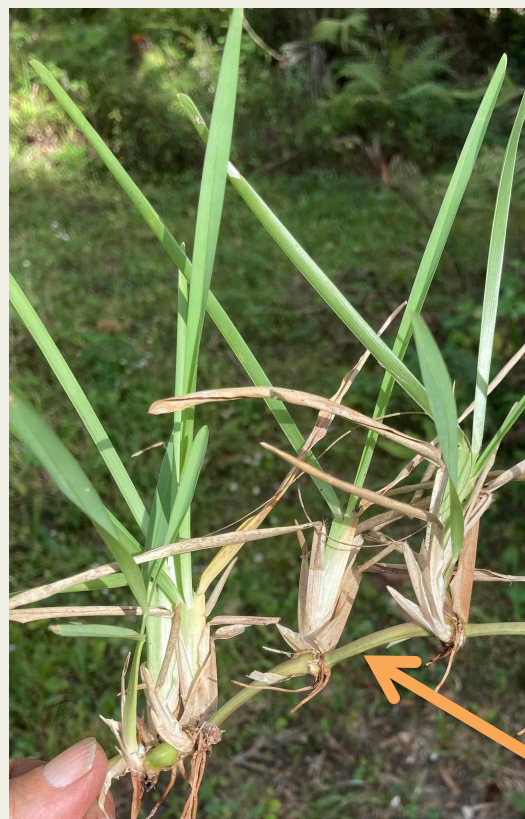
Flowering recognition: Single fleshy rod to 4 inches tall.

Flowering period: Spring – fall.

Habitat: Dry or somewhat wet disturbed sites; hammocks, roadsides.

Look-a-likes:

Leaf-cluster bases are flat and can be confused with several native grasses, including young *Andropogon* spp., “broomgrass”, *Eustachys* spp., “finger grass”.



Runner (stolon)



runners

Urochloa arrecta

(formerly *Brachiaria arrecta*)

Sig Walker grass, Creeping signalgrass,
Tannergrass

FISC (FLEPPC): Not native.

Plant family: Poaceae (grass family).

Snapshot: Creeping grass with long lateral leafy stems.

Vegetative recognition: Persists many seasons through runners above and below ground. Creeping above-ground stems are very long, with leaves (<6 inches long) spaced apart, rooting at lower nodes, and clambering over other vegetation. Some authorities list Sig Walker grass as lacking hairs on leaf sheaths and nodes, but this character is unreliable.

Flowering recognition: Inflorescence has 4 or more flowering branches with tightly packed spikelets in 2 rows on a flattened rachis (flower-branch stem).

Flowering period: Spring – summer.

Habitat: Ditches, ponds, cypress swamps, disturbed wet & sunny sites.

Invasive comments: Very difficult to control this grass with herbicide in low wetlands because of the extensive stem/root system deep in the muck.

ID learning location: Boardwalk at Bird Rookery Trail.

Taxonomic note: Some plants have ID characters that cross between *U. arrecta* and *U. mutica*. Do they hybridize?

Look-a-likes: *Urochloa mutica*, “para grass”, invasive, see next page.

Location note: Sig Walker grass is primarily found in/near southern CREW where it was introduced for cattle. Not yet found in Picayune, but was found in Panther Refuge.



Sig Walker grass has solo spikelets, arranged in 2 rows.



Sig Walker grass

Para grass

Urochloa mutica

Para grass

FISC (FLEPPC): Category I.

Plant family: Poaceae (grass family).

Snapshot: Creeping grass with long lateral leafy stems.

Vegetative recognition: Persists many seasons. Creeping above-ground stems are very long, with leaves (<6 inches long) spaced apart, rooting at lower nodes, and clambering over other vegetation. Vegetation is noticeably hairy.

Flowering recognition: Inflorescence has 4 or more flowering branches with tightly packed spikelets in 2 rows on a flattened rachis (flower-branch stem). Some spikelets are paired.

Flowering period: Summer – fall.

Habitat: Ditches, marshes, roadsides, and other wet disturbed sites.

Look-a-likes: *Urochloa arrecta*, “Sig Walker grass”, invasive, see previous page.

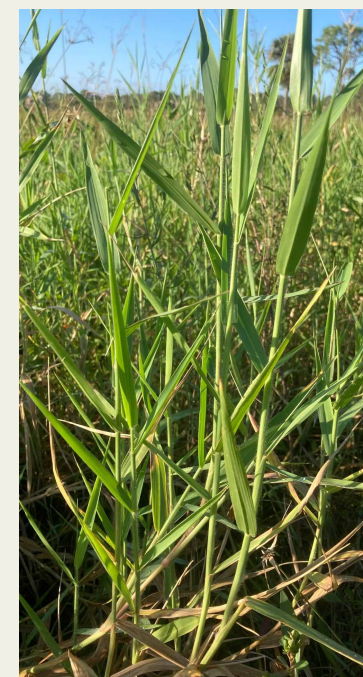
Location note: Para grass is more widely distributed than Sig Walker grass. Para is common in ditches throughout agriculture lands of eastern Collier County– and the *Urochloa* species ID’ed at Picayune, thus far (2022).

Some of para grass spikelets are paired; pairs arranged in 2 rows.



Sig Walker grass

Para grass



Photographic credits

Maureen S. Bonness: all photos

Resources

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