

Johnson Grass

(*Sorghum halepense*)

Johnson grass is large grass, introduced into the US from Turkey in the early 1800's by Colonel William Johnson, its namesake. Originally brought to the US as a forage grass, it quickly became wild and is now considered an invasive weed in 24 US states. IN fact, Johnson grass was the target of the first federal grant issued specifically for weed control in 1900! Johnson grass is found in all the lower US states with the exception of Maine. It is also found in Hawaii and throughout the Caribbean.

Johnson grass can grow to eight feet tall, and the flowering tips can be up to two feet in length. When Johnson grass is in bloom, the ends of the grass take on a reddish hue (see photo, below right). While the grass will die back in winter months, it re-sprouts when temperatures reach 60° F.

Johnson grass will flower between May and July in most of the US, though extreme southern areas may see Johnson grass blooming as late as December. The pollen has been shown to induce asthma, allergic rhinitis (allergic inflammation of the nose) and allergic conjunctivitis (allergic inflammation of the eyes). While related to many of the Poa grasses, and having some of the same allergens, Johnson grass is seen as a unique allergenic grass that stands on its own.

