

# Invasive Alien Plant Species of Virginia

## Weeping Lovegrass (*Eragrostis curvala* (Schrader) Nees)

### Description

Weeping lovegrass is a member of the grass family (Poaceae) with a large fibrous root system. It is a clump forming grass which grows to a height of 2 to 6 feet. The inflorescence is a lax, open panicle, commonly 8 to 10 inches long. It is characterized by erect, stiff, slender stems with dark green, very narrow, arching foliage, 1/16 to 1/8 inch wide. Flowering in Virginia commences in late June–early July. Consult a natural resource specialist for positive identification.

### Habitat

Native to the mountains of Tanzania, weeping lovegrass was imported to this country in 1927 by the U.S. Department of Agriculture for use in erosion control in Florida, Texas and Arizona. Being very drought tolerant, it grows well in hot, dry locations in full sun and in most soils if they are well drained. It thrives in sandy soils and is now commonly seen on highway embankments all over the South where it is a perennial and as far north as New Jersey (freeze hardy to a temperature of approximately -10° F). It remains an evergreen in the absence of frost (zones 10-11).

### Distribution

Weeping lovegrass has spread across the entire southern portion of

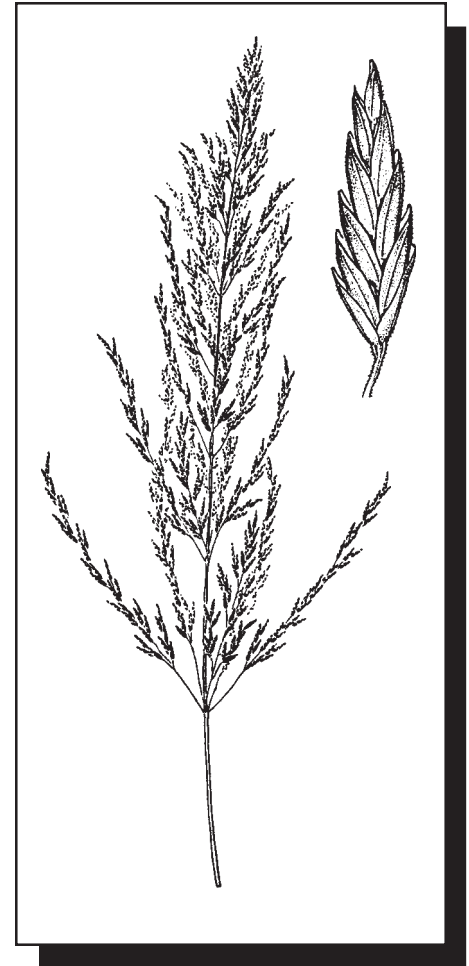
the United States and northward as far as Pennsylvania and New Jersey where it is still spreading by self seeding. The greatest contributor to its spread, however, has been its intentional use along highway embankments. In Virginia it is found throughout the Coastal Plain, the Piedmont and the Shenandoah Valley.

### Threat

Because of its drought tolerance and the ease with which seed-based propagation occurs, weeping lovegrass has become a pest throughout its range. It is known to crowd out other native grasses as a result of its aggressive nature and its characteristic rapid early growth that forms an early ground cover that chokes out other plants. It offers no benefits to wildlife and its uses, other than ornamental, are food for livestock and erosion control.

### Control

The popularity of weeping lovegrass in horticultural circles and for erosion control has made this a plant commonly found in nurseries and garden centers. It can be controlled by digging out the root system in late winter or early spring, followed by a prescribed fire to kill remaining seeds. Foliar application of a glyphosate herbicide is effective in



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spring after the new foliage is in full growth but before blossom heads have formed. Glyphosate herbicides are recommended because they are biodegradable. However, glyphosate is a nonselective systemic herbicide that affects all green vegetation. To be safe and effective, herbicide use requires a cautious

For more information, contact the Department of Conservation and Recreation or the Virginia Native Plant Society.



Department of Conservation & Recreation  
CONSERVING VIRGINIA'S NATURAL AND RECREATIONAL RESOURCES  
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Virginia Native Plant Society

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Jim Gilmore, Governor • John Paul Woodley, Jr., Secretary of Natural Resources • David G. Brickley, Director, Department of Conservation and Recreation

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attitude, knowledge of the chemicals, appropriate concentrations, and the effective method and timing of their application.

### Alternative Plants

Native plant species are commercially available that provide erosion control and food and cover for wildlife but are not invasive to natural landscapes. Roundheaded bushclover (*Lespedeza capitata*) is a native species which enriches the soil with nitrogen and provides forage for wildlife. If ornamental use is the purpose, a native warm season grass species that might be considered is switchgrass (*Panicum virgatum*), although it does not have the fountain-like characteristic of lovegrass.

For more information on native plant conservation, contact the Virginia Native Plant Society at the address below. For information on Virginia's natural areas and natural heritage resources, contact the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation's Natural Heritage Program (see address below).

*This fact sheet was prepared with the assistance of Edith Guthrie in the process of her meeting course requirements at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University.*

### References

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