

Japanese Stiltgrass - *Microstegium vimineum*

Japanese stiltgrass is an annual grass considered to be one of the most aggressive invasive plants in forestlands in southern Illinois. Several new populations have recently been found in northern Illinois. Be on the lookout for it and report any suspected infestations in southern or central Illinois to the IWAP Invasive Species Campaign at rivertoriver@gmail.com or in northern Illinois to the New Invaders Watch Program at <http://newinvaders.org>.



Illinois Distribution

Impacts

Japanese stiltgrass can quickly form dense stands that shade and compete with native understory plants, lowering native species diversity. It can quickly become the dominant vegetation. With its high shade tolerance, stiltgrass has the potential to invade high-quality mature forests, once thought to be relatively resistant to invasion. Stiltgrass has no value as a wildlife food. The dense thatch of older infestations can be a fire hazard and may impede tree seedling establishment. Established infestations are very difficult to remove and spread rapidly. For further information on the impacts and management of Japanese stiltgrass, view the presentations from the 2010 Stiltgrass Summit at www.rtrcwma.org/stiltgrass.

Diagnostic Characteristics

Multi-stemmed growth



Bright thatch



Leaves with silver midrib



Infestation



Identification

Stiltgrass is a weak rooted and sprawling grass that can grow to heights of 6 feet, though it is usually much shorter. Taller plants usually lie flat along the ground or propped up against other vegetation. Plants usually have multiple weak stems. The leaves are short and wide with smooth edges and a noticeable silvery midrib on older leaves. The flowers and fruits are borne on thin, often branched spikes on the top of a delicate stem. In the fall, the tops of the plant turn purple or brown in color, giving this plant one of its other common names, browntop. In winter, the thatch is a very noticeable bright tan to orange color.

Habitat

Japanese stiltgrass can be found in a variety of habitats. It is most often an invader of moist forests, but can also be found on roadsides, ditches, field edges, old fields, upland forests, wet meadows, and intermittent streams. The seeds are easily spread by equipment, contaminated soil, mud on hikers boots, and flood waters. Infestations are likely to start along a trail, roadside, or waterway and then rapidly move throughout the area. Stiltgrass is often accidentally introduced or encouraged by practices that disturbed the soil or increase light into a forest, such as logging, prescribed fire, trail building, ditch maintenance, or roadside mowing.

Stiltgrass is actively spreading throughout Illinois, be on the lookout for the high priority invasive species