

# Stop

# The Invasion



Photographs courtesy of Wendy Brown and Joseph M. BiTomaso, [invasive.org](http://invasive.org)

## Cordgrass; Spartina

*Spartina alterniflora*

### Report Sightings

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[InvasiveSpecies.wa.gov](http://InvasiveSpecies.wa.gov)

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### What is it?

Spartina, also called cordgrasses, are species of aquatic grasses that grow on the mud flats and marshes. The plants tend to grow in bright green circular clumps. It has vigorously colonized intertidal saltwater areas as well as the perimeters of freshwater areas. This grass outcompetes native plant species, including rare and endangered plant species, reducing marsh biodiversity and ecological functions.

### Is it here yet?

Yes. Cordgrass can be found in parts of Puget Sound, Grays Harbor, and Willapa Bay. It has also been reported in Kitsap, Mason, and Jefferson counties, and small populations were recently located near the mouth of the Columbia River.

### Why should I care?

Rhizomes, a type of underground stem, spread outwards from a cordgrass plant in all directions. New plants can grow from the outstretched rhizomes, eventually forming large patches. Clumps of cordgrass or seeds can break off and wash across bays and root in new areas. Cordgrass reduces open mud feeding habitats of shorebirds, competes with indigenous salt marsh vegetation, and alters the hydrology, structure, and function of wetlands. Once established, controlling and managing cordgrass is extremely difficult and expensive.

### What should I do if I find one?

Report a sighting online at [www.invasivespecies.wa.gov/report.shtml](http://www.invasivespecies.wa.gov/report.shtml).

### How can we stop it?

Do not purchase, plant, or trade this species. Diking can be used as a way to confine the lateral spread of rhizomes. Seedlings can be hand pulled or covered with a geotextile fabric. Mowing spartina repeatedly also has reduced larger infestations.



## What are its characteristics?

- Tall, clumping, perennial grass, growing 2 to 7 feet in height with creeping rhizomes.
- Leaves have flat blades and can be 1/4 to 3/5 inch wide and 12 to 20 inches long.
- Ligules, the outgrowth from the sheath of the leaf blade, consist of a fringe of hairs.
- Stems are hairless and hollow.
- Flowering occurs from June to November. Flowers grow from 4 to 16 inches tall and about 1/3 to 1 inch wide, each made up of 5 to 30 flowering spikes.

## How do I distinguish it from native species?

Spartina may resemble native sedges (*Carex* spp.), or other grasses like saltgrass (*Distichlis spicata*), tufted hairgrass (*Deschampsia caespitosa*), or American dunegrass (*Leymus mollis*). Grasses like spartina have hollow stems that distinguish them from sedges. Seed/flower heads are the most reliable way to distinguish between different species of grasses.

## Where do I get more information?

- Plant Conservation Alliance: [www.nps.gov/plants/alien/fact/spali.htm](http://www.nps.gov/plants/alien/fact/spali.htm)
- University of Florida's Center for Aquatic and Invasive Plants: <http://plants.ifas.ufl.edu/node/432>
- Global Invasive Species Database: [www.issg.org/database/species/management\\_info.asp?si=76&fr=1&sts=&lang=EN](http://www.issg.org/database/species/management_info.asp?si=76&fr=1&sts=&lang=EN)
- Friends of Willapa National Wildlife Refuge: [www.friendsofwillaparefuge.org/cordgrassstudy1.pdf](http://www.friendsofwillaparefuge.org/cordgrassstudy1.pdf)
- Washington State Noxious Weed Control Board: [http://www.nwcb.wa.gov/weed\\_info/Spartina\\_alterniflora.html](http://www.nwcb.wa.gov/weed_info/Spartina_alterniflora.html)

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