

HYMENACHNE AMPLEXICAULIS (RUDGE) NEES

Poaceae (Gramineae)/Grass Family

- Common Names:** West Indian marsh grass, trompetilla
Synonymy: *Panicum amplexicaulis* Rudge
Origin: West Indies, tropical Central and South America

Botanical Description: Robust perennial grass from stolons. Stems floating, creeping, or ascending to 1 m (3 ft) or more in height, sparingly branched, rooting at the lower nodes; stems pithy, not hollow. Leaf sheaths glabrous but with hairs on upper margins; ligule a membrane. Leaf blades flat, to 35 cm (14 in) long and to 4 cm (1.6 in) wide, cordate at the base and clasping the stem (amplexicaul); glabrous but with long hairs on lower margins. Inflorescence a terminal panicle, dense and spike-like, about 8 mm (0.3 in) wide and to 50 cm (20 in) long; spikelets short stalked, 3.3-4.3 mm long, scabrous on the veins, often opened slightly at the apex.

NOTE: May be confused with the native *Sacciolepis striata* (L.) Nash, American cupscale, which has a similar inflorescence, or with other marsh grasses of similar form, but *Hymenachne* stems distinctive in containing white pith (most grass stems are hollow) (Pohl and Lersten 1975).

Ecological Significance: First noted in botanical works for Florida in 1968 (Ward); described by Hall (1978) as “rare” in “low wet pastures” of south Florida. Possibly a natural introduction by migratory birds; can form extensive colonies in its natural habitats (Hill 1996). Has become, along with par grass, the dominant species in much of the Myakka River basin’s native maidencane marsh, occurring primarily in the deeper water along the river channel while par grass dominates the shallower zones near the uplands (J. Huffman 1992). Observed in 1993 as “common” in ditches, marshes, and mucky wet areas south of Clewiston, and in “large stands” in nearby detention ponds (E. C. Watson, U.S. Sugar Corp., 1993 personal communication). Dense populations also reported for the Ringling MacArthur tract in Sarasota County and for Mountain Lake in Hernando County (EPPC 1996), and for marsh areas along Fisheating Creek, near Lake Okeechobee, where it is displacing maidencane communities (Jackie Smith, Florida Department of Environmental Protection, 1995 personal communication). Scattered colonies reported for Collier Seminole State Park (EPPC 1996). Colonizing and becoming difficult to control along drainage canals of south central Florida (Mike Bodle, South Florida Water Management District, 1997 personal communication).

Distribution: Now found in tropics of both hemispheres (Howard 1979). In Florida, documented by herbarium specimens from Collier, Hendry, Lee, Palm Beach, and Sarasota counties (Wunderlin *et al.* 1995). Considered a principal agricultural weed in Surinam, a common weed in Indonesia, and present as a weed in Trinidad (Holm *et al.* 1979).

WEST INDIAN MARSH GRASS

Life History: Adapted to fluctuating water levels, i.e., cycles of flooding and drying, which allow massive regeneration by seed and ensure persistence after extensive drought periods (Wildin 1988). Observed as tolerating 40 weeks of flooding and maximum flooding depths of 1.2 m (4 ft) (Tejos 1980). Flowers in the fall (Wunderlin 1982), with observed germination rates variable, 0-86% (Hill 1996). Seed more widely dispersed during periods of high standing water (J. Mullahey, University of Florida, personal observations).

AMF



Along Fisheating Creek, Glades County

KCB



Spike-like panicle