

EHRHARTA

Also known as panic veldt grass

Ehrharta erecta

Grass Family (Poaceae)

DESCRIPTION

Ehrharta is a slender, clumping perennial grass found in both disturbed sites and wildlands, particularly in moist, shady areas. It tolerates a variety of soil types.

Ehrharta has semi-erect stems up to 2 feet tall. The leaf blades are broad, green, flat, and 2–5 inches long. The fibrous root system has filaments that sprawl downwards. Fire and drought may spur additional growth. The plant can die back during the dry season, leading to an accumulation of leaf litter.

REPRODUCTION

Ehrharta reproduces by tiny seeds that are easily dispersed by wind, water, human activity (e.g., gardening equipment or clothing), and possibly birds. Seeds germinate with the start of the winter rains and into late spring. Ehrharta can also spread vegetatively by tillers.

IMPACT

Ehrharta competes with native grass species, such as Torrey's melic, which has a similar appearance. It can form a continuous carpet of vegetation in moist soil, preventing establishment of other species, particularly annual wildflowers and grasses.

KEY FACTORS

- u The same plant can reseed repeatedly throughout the growing season.
- u High seed production.
- u Seedbank thought to persist for several years.
- u Resprouts from stem nodes and tips.



TREATMENT OPTIONS

- u Pull individual plants and clumps by hand 4–6 times a year, starting at the onset of the rainy season when seedlings first emerge, and continuing until the start of the dry season. (Before pulling, you can flag outlying individuals that could be easily overlooked. Some practitioners have found that as Ehrharta is difficult to see under larger plants, one option is to trim shrubs to expose those grasses growing near the base.) Grasp firmly, making sure you pull below the nodes. If part of the root crown breaks off, dig out the remaining portion.

If hand removal is your main approach, make sure you get the entire root and all the stems. Hand pulling is feasible in light or patchy infestations, where native species remain. It can be a successful technique if carried out persistently over several years, but may work best in conjunction with other treatments.

- u **Cover** dense patches with weed fabric (preferably a permeable barrier to reduce water runoff on slopes) to suppress germination of seedlings.
- u **Foliar spray.** Herbicide may be the best option for dense stands of *Ehrharta*. Given the plant's tendency to grow under other species, make sure you choose a selective herbicide so you don't kill the overlying vegetation.

Several experimental treatments for mature *Ehrharta* are underway at Audubon Canyon Ranch in Marin County. These include hand pulling clumps of grasses before the grass starts to flower; covering the infestation with a black polyethylene tarp to solarize the weeds; or applying 1–2 percent glyphosate during senescence (after seeds have set and when the grass is dying back). Initial results suggest glyphosate is effective on mature grasses without prior cutting, although an even weaker concentration may be equally successful. Experimental methods to kill

seeds and seedlings include mulching; flaming with a torch; or the use of pre-emergent herbicide. Results are not yet conclusive.

DISPOSAL

Ehrharta seeds germinate readily on contact with water or moist soil, so any seed heads should be bagged immediately and removed from the site.

FOLLOW-UP

Success lies in persistent follow-up, whichever treatment you choose. New seedlings grow very densely and can be tilled with an oscillating hoe. Scrape seedlings off the soil surface and leave them to dry out. If you are covering the *Ehrharta*, you can cut holes in the tarp and plant native species.

INTERESTING FACTS

Ehrharta is native to South Africa. It became established in California during the 1930s.

Notes