

African Lovegrass

Department of Primary Industries

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Common and scientific names

African lovegrass

Eragrostis curvula (Schrad.) Nees

Status

African lovegrass is a Regionally Prohibited Weed in Mallee, North Central, North East, West and East Gippsland, Catchment and Land Protection Regions and is a Regionally Controlled Weed in Port Phillip West and Goulburn Broken. Landowners in areas where African Lovegrass is Regionally Prohibited must eradicate it on their land. Control of African Lovegrass on roadsides in these areas is the responsibility of the road manager. Landholders in areas where African Lovegrass is Regionally Controlled must take all reasonable steps to control it and prevent its spread on their land and the roadsides which adjoin their land.

Origin and Distribution

African lovegrass originated in southern Africa. It was first identified from a few scattered localities in Victoria but is now found in most regions and is a particular problem in irrigated areas. It is common in the Gippsland Lakes district and the Wimmera and Mallee regions. African lovegrass favours acidic sands and sandy loam soils in the 400 to 700 mm annual rainfall belt.

African lovegrass was probably introduced to Australia accidentally before 1900 but has subsequently been deliberately imported as a pasture grass. Four of the seven agronomic types are now naturalised in Australia.

Description

African lovegrass is a densely tufted perennial grass 20-120 cm high that reproduces by seed. Seeds germinate in autumn or spring given adequate moisture. Growth slows or stops in winter.

Stems - Slender or robust, sometimes bent at the lower nodes, up to 120 cm long.

Leaves - Dark green to blue-green in colour, blades narrow, 3 mm wide and 25-35 cm long, narrowly tapered and often curled near tips, margins often folded or rolled inwards. Basal sheath around stem yellowish or purplish, keeled and marked with striations. Between the leaf blade and the sheath is a conspicuous ring or beard of hairs.

Flowers - Grey- or leaden-green, in groups of 4 to 13, 4 to 10 mm long and 1 to 1.5 mm wide; flower heads vary from compact to loose, and form spreading panicles 6 to 30 cm long and up to 20 cm wide.

Seeds - Creamy to dark orange or almost brown, 0.3 to 0.7 mm long. Ripe seed present from January to March.

Roots - Fibrous, mainly in the upper 50 cm of soil.

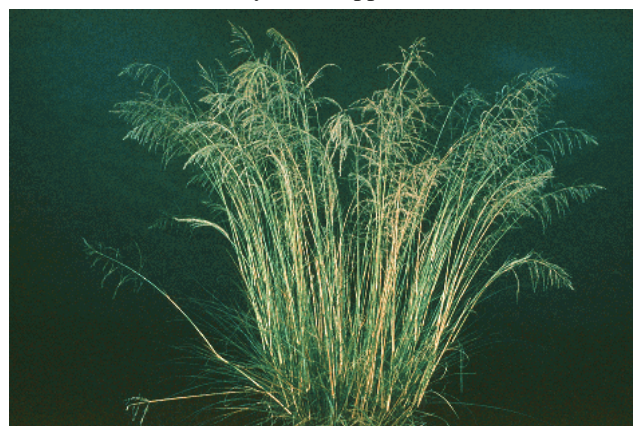


Figure 1. African lovegrass.

Similar species

Sixteen species of *Eragrostis* are present in Victoria, of which five are introduced species. Stink-grass, *E. ciliaris* (All.) Vignolo, a common weed in irrigation areas, is a malodorous annual grass. Smaller stink-grass, *E. minor* Host has been rarely collected in Victoria. Soft lovegrass, *E. pilosa* (L.) P.Beauv. is mainly confined to central northern irrigation areas. Mexican lovegrass, *E. mexicana* (Hornem.) Link, is a weed mainly confined to urban areas of Melbourne. Reference should be made to Walsh (1994) to distinguish these other weeds and the native species of *Eragrostis* from African lovegrass.

The Problem

African lovegrass is a highly persistent summer growing tussock grass. The young growth, before production of seed heads, is generally palatable and nutritious to stock, but is produced at times when feed is generally available from more palatable species. Older growth has low palatability and is avoided by animals and eaten only when other pasture has been consumed. African lovegrass can

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How much do they cost you?**

thus spread and dominate sparse overgrazed pastures forming pure, dense swards.

Growth of African lovegrass is temperature dependant. Seed germinates when temperatures exceed 10°C. Stem and seed production can continue throughout the year in warmer parts of Australia.



Figure 2. Flowering spike of African lovegrass.

Dispersal

Seed can be spread short distances by wind and is also dispersed by animals, machinery, vehicles and in hay. It is readily spread during road construction in contaminated soils.

Management program

Some control methods described in this note are only effective if used in combination with other control options as part of a long-term management program.

Control of African lovegrass must be integrated into an overall land management program. In arable areas cultivation and cropping or the establishment of vigorous perennial pasture will give good control. Newly sown pastures should be spelled for at least a year to aid their establishment and African lovegrass seedlings should be removed from the sward by hoeing or with herbicides.

In non-arable areas the possibility of utilising the plant as a pasture species should be investigated, especially at its palatable early growth stages. The plant quickly loses palatability after jointing occurs, although feed quality can be maintained by top dressing, especially with nitrogen, and heavy rotational grazing. All dead matter should be removed by burning in autumn or mid spring (not winter) and the pasture should be grazed heavily in the first summer, then over sown with clovers the following autumn. Heavy rotational grazing should be commenced when the African lovegrass grows through the clover sward.



Figure 3. Roadside infestation of African lovegrass.

Chemical Control

Registrations of products can change from time to time, and it is therefore important for chemical users to ensure they refer to current information about chemical use patterns and legislative obligations. An Agricultural Chemical User Permit (ACUP) is required for use of 'restricted use' chemicals in Victoria, and there are restrictions on certain chemical uses in Agricultural Chemical Control Areas.

Since 24 July 2007, records of chemical use MUST be made and kept for all agricultural chemical use, not only for 'restricted use' chemicals as was required previously. Chemical users must make within 48 hours of use, and keep for a period of 2 years, records of use specified in the Agriculture Note AG1212; "Keeping Chemical Use Records (Give me one good reason!)"

For further information on chemical use patterns and/or legislative obligations in relation to chemical use in Victoria call the DPI Customer Service Centre on 136186, or visit the Chemical Standards Branch website: www.dpi.vic.gov.au/chemicalstandards

All land managers have a responsibility to control weeds on their property.

Further advice

- Contact your local landcare or friends group for further assistance and advice.
- Call the DPI/DSE Customer Service Centre on 136 186.
- Contact your local DPI Pest Management Officer for advice on local programs.
- Visit the DPI website at: <http://www.dpi.vic.gov.au> and the Weeds Australia website at: <http://www.weeds.org.au>

References

- Parsons, W.T. and Cuthbertson, E.G. (1992) *Noxious Weeds of Australia*. Melbourne, Inkata Press.
- Walsh, N.G. (1994) *Eragrostis*. Pp. 560-568 in Walsh, N.G. and Entwisle, T.J. (Eds.) *Flora of Victoria Volume 2 Ferns and Allied Plants, Conifers and Monocotyledons*. Melbourne, Inkata Press.

Acknowledgements

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