



Native grasses

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Native grasses are those that occurred in Australia before European settlement. The most common of the 226 native grasses in Victoria are described.

All the native grasses described are perennials.

Recognition of grasses is easiest when they are flowering, in the summer months.

Red grass (*Bothriochloa macra*)

Red grass, sometimes known as redleg grass, forms a prostrate tuft with basal leaves and numerous wiry stems. The base of the stems and the leaves are often reddish or purplish. Red grass flowers in summer and autumn.

Red grass is drought tolerant. Its roots grow rapidly and roots have been found up to 1.5 metres below the soil surface. It is frost tolerant, however it appears to die back very quickly after the first frosts of the year and becomes unpalatable once this occurs.



Red grass produces moderate amounts of spring summer growth, its stem to leaf ratio is high. Stems are of low acceptability and digestibility, but the high quality leaves are readily eaten.

Red grass can grow and persist under low fertility conditions but its response to fertiliser is similar to that of ryegrass. It responds positively to grazing.

Windmill grass (*Chloris truncata*)

The characteristic windmill shaped seedhead gives this grass its common name. The plants make rapid growth in

early spring. They are prostrate with small fibrous leaves which are not readily grazed. Windmill grass is relatively short lived. It flowers from spring through to autumn.



Windmill grass responds positively to both increasing soil fertility and grazing. It is moderately tolerant of drought but its frost tolerance is low.

Wallaby grass (*Austrodanthonia spp.*)

Commonly called wallaby grass or white top there are about fifty species of *Austrodanthonia* in Australia of which 24 are found in Victoria.

Wallaby grass is a fine leaved tussocky plant which remains green throughout the year. It flowers from spring through to autumn.



Wallaby grasses are some of the most valuable native grasses in the pastoral areas of Australia due to their persistence, palatability and productivity. The leaf component is high quality throughout the year and approaches that of tall fescue and phalaris.

Wallaby grass withstands drought and frost. The component of wallaby grass in pasture increases with increased stocking rate and increasing soil fertility.

Two selections of wallaby grass have been commercialised; Taranna and Bunderra. Both were selected on the northern tablelands of NSW. They are both moderately tolerant of low soil fertility and acid soil conditions. The seeds are very small (1.5 million per kilogram) and so must be sown on the soil surface. Bunderra is suited to heavier textured soils.

Common wheat grass (*Elymus scaber*)

The common name of this species is based on the appearance of the seedhead which is like a laterally flattened wheat seedhead. It has a tussocky habit and commences growth in spring. It flowers from July to December. There is considerable variation within the species.



The young succulent leaves of common wheat grass provide high quality palatable feed, however, damage to the eyes of stock by the seedhead has been recorded. It is highly tolerant of frost and moderately tolerant of drought. Increasing grazing pressure and increasing soil fertility both result in better growth.

Curly windmill grass (*Enteropogon acicularis*)

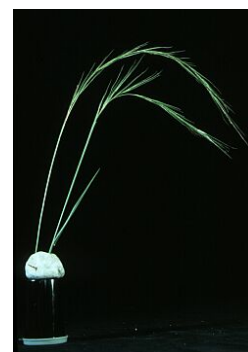
Curly windmill grass, sometimes known as spider grass, was once the dominant species of the drier parts of Victoria's Northern Plains grassland but is now confined to protected remnant areas.



This species is tussocky with a sprawling habit. The leaves, often bluish-green in colour, are flat and curl when dry. The seedhead, which appears over summer-autumn, has 2 to 14 stiff spikes spreading from the stem tip in several planes. This species is moderately palatable and is only grazed when young. It is very drought tolerant and moderately tolerant of frost. It responds positively to both increased grazing pressure and increasing soil fertility.

Weeping grass (*Microlaena stipoides*)

Weeping grass remains green throughout the year. The common name is based on the weeping nature of the seedhead. It has a rhizomatous habit. It flowers over the summer-autumn period. Weeping grass is drought tolerant and frost hardy.



Weeping grass is persistent under grazing and is highly productive and nutritious. It is reported to be as productive as tall fescue and phalaris. It grows well with subterranean clover on naturally acid soils and under conditions of moderate to high soil fertility.

Kangaroo grass (*Themeda triandra*)

Kangaroo grass probably dominated all Australian grasslands before European settlement. It is still one of Australia's most wide spread species extending from the arid interior to the alps. It is highly drought tolerant but its

tolerance of frost is only low to moderate. It is deep rooted and has a tussocky habit. It flowers over the summer-autumn period. Its forage value is considered moderate.



This grass is very common especially in areas that are not heavily grazed, such as cemeteries and railway lines. Kangaroo grass decreases under grazing. Although it responds to increasing soil fertility it does not maintain its dominance under these conditions.

Wire grass (*Aristida ramosa*)

A warm season grass which usually grows as a dense stemmy tussock producing very little leaf. Wire grass has a distinctive seed that is characterised by three awns. The seed is a major problem as a contaminant of both fleeces and carcasses.

The leaves produced by this grass are small, inaccessible to stock and very wiry. It is generally regarded as unpalatable and unproductive.



Wire grass flowers from spring through to autumn. This species declines under increasing soil fertility and heavy grazing. It is moderately tolerant of frost and is highly tolerant of drought.

Spear grass (*Austostipa spp.*)

There are approximately 60 species of spear grass, of which five are introduced. Spear grass is coarsely tufted and has a tussocky habit. Flowering occurs from spring through to autumn.

While potentially a desirable species because of the amount of green leaf material produced, spear grass's sharp awns are a major contaminant of fleece and carcasses.



Spear grass is highly tolerant of frost and drought but declines under increasing grazing pressure and soil fertility.

The previous version of this note was published in February 2002.

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