

African Love Grass – Fact Sheet

“*Eragrostis curvula*”

African lovegrass is a native of southern Africa. This grass was probably first introduced to Australia by accident as a contaminant of pasture seed. Different cultivars of this grass have also been used as a soil stabiliser in erosion control situations. African lovegrass has been known to be planted in different locations and has naturalised in all Australian states on acidic, red, and especially sandy, soils.

Description

African lovegrass is a densely tufted, perennial species that can grow up to 1.2 m in height. The plant is generally erect but stems may bend at the lower nodes, where the whole plant often adopts a weeping habit.

- Leaves: long strap-like narrow leaves varying in length and colour from bright green to blue-green.
- Flowers: panicle 6-30 cm long, 10-20 cm broad.
- Seed: creamy to dark orange, almost brown. 0.3 to 0.7 mm long. Seed heads can be up to 30 cm long.
- Roots: fibrous, mainly in the upper 50cm soil.

A distinguishing feature of African lovegrass is that the basal sheaths, surrounding its crown at ground level, have very fine silky hairs.

Distribution

African lovegrass has become widely naturalized in Australia, mainly on coarse textured acid soils in higher rainfall environments. In New South Wales the species occurs on the Northern, Central and Southern Tablelands, and near Slopes and around Canberra and Bega.

Ecology

Seeds germinate in autumn or spring. Flowering begins in early summer. Ripe seeds present from January to March. Growth slows in winter, is susceptible to frosts and recommences as temperatures rise in spring. African lovegrass has a high reproductive rate and grows quickly in warm weather. It can form dense colonies, which crowd out other plants.

Problem

African lovegrass produces vast quantities of seeds, which very quickly develop into a large viable seed bank, making the plant very difficult to eradicate. It is extremely competitive with other pasture species and is an aggressive invader, quickly overtaking sparse, overgrazed or poor quality pastures. When mature, most varieties are unpalatable to stock and other favourable pasture grasses are usually consumed in preference to lovegrass.

It contains a low (3%) level of protein, resulting in stock doing poorly on pastures of African lovegrass. African lovegrass can form dense monocultures up to 1.2 m high. This can create environmental impacts, such as large fuel loads in the dry months, posing a fire hazard, and competition with native species regeneration.

Prevention

The best control strategy is to keep African lovegrass off the property. Any plants found should be destroyed before setting seed to prevent infestation. Successful control is a management problem requiring removal of the weed by cultivation or chemicals and replacing it with a competitive perennial pasture species.

Ensure purchases of fodder, stock, produce and soils are free of weed seeds. If stock is brought from infested areas they should be kept for at least 14 days in a holding paddock to clean out. Studies have shown that cattle feeding on African lovegrass can excrete viable seed up to 10 days after consumption. Seed can be moved around on stock, in fodder, produce, on motor vehicles and machinery and in soil.

Mechanical/physical control

Any physical disturbance of African lovegrass, such as slashing and ploughing, can promote spread and reinfestation. Therefore if mechanical practices are necessary, they must be carried out carefully and with clean equipment, which must also be cleaned after use.

Information provided by Glen Innes Severn Council, Weed Officer David Nixon. Previously published in GLENRAC news July/August 2008.



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