

# WHISKEY GRASS

*Andropogon virginicus*



Photographs are courtesy of Dr Sheldon Navie

## Description & life cycle

Whiskey grass is a weed of roadsides, disturbed sites, waste areas, pastures, wetlands, grasslands and open woodlands in sub-tropical and warmer temperate regions. Originally native to the Americas, this species is thought to have been introduced to Australia prior to 1900 in packing with American whiskey bottles.

Whiskey grass is a long-lived tussocky grass that usually grows 0.5-1.5 m tall. It develops a tuft of long and narrow leaves (up to 40 cm long and 2-5 mm wide) at the base of the plant and then produces very upright and branched stems at certain times of the year. The seed-heads consist of numerous tiny branches (2-3 cm long) partly enclosed by brownish or bronze-coloured leafy bracts. The stalks of these branches are very slender and a cluster of fluffy seeds with long white hairs (5-10 mm long) is produced inside each of the leafy bracts.

This species prefers very open sunny areas and is particularly common along tracks and on roadsides, but unlike many exotic weeds it is also known to invade native plant communities that are deficient in nutrients. Whiskey grass remains as a hidden tuft of leaves during spring and summer, but in autumn it sends up numerous very upright leafy stems that produce vast quantities of fluffy wind-borne seeds. These stems quickly turn brownish-orange and die off by the end of autumn, when they are very obvious and highly flammable. The older stems are of low nutritional value to livestock, and therefore also reduce the productivity of invaded pastures.

## Key features

- > Long-lived tufted grass with very upright stems
- > Seeds prolifically for a short period during autumn
- > Stems turn brownish-orange and become very obvious during winter

## Control

1. Younger plants can be controlled manually by cutting the fibrous roots off below the crown. For mature plants, cut off the seed-heads and bag them, then cut out the plant as described above.
2. Broadacre spraying using a boom spray can efficiently kill large areas of this weed, but if this method is to be employed use caution as it can also kill large areas of desirable species. Individual plants can be spot-sprayed with herbicides when they are actively growing. This is best done when they are beginning to produce their upright stems, but prior to seed production. Herbicide control is usually not effective once the plant turns brownish-orange and stops growing.
3. In Queensland, herbicides including the active ingredients fluazifop, haloxyfop and glyphosate can be used to control perennial grasses such as Whiskey grass in non-crop areas via the conditions outlined on the APVMA off-label permit PER11463. In NSW, SA, WA and ACT herbicides including the active ingredients flupropanate, fluazifop and glyphosate can be used to control tussocky grasses such as Whiskey grass in non-crop areas via the conditions outlined on the APVMA off-label permit PER9792.

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