

Weed of
National Significance

SERRATED TUSSOCK

(*Nassella trichotoma*)

Jackie Miles/Max Campbell



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Southern Tablelands & South Coast
Noxious Plants Committee



Weed: serrated tussock

Lynton Bond



Weed: serrated tussock. Note the hill in the background – the left is free of the weed whereas the right is infested

Why is serrated tussock a weed?

- Extremely invasive, having severe effects on the environment
- Outcompetes native vegetation, especially in grasslands, and grows to dominate pasture, removing habitat for native species and decreasing carrying capacity
- Serrated tussock is highly unpalatable and only eaten when there's nothing else available
- Drought and frost resistant, adapts to different soil types
- Produces copious amounts of seeds
- Seed viability in soil up to 15 years

Description

Plant: erect perennial tussock grass, mature plants to 50cm high, base diameter 25cm, drooping leaves and seed heads, less fertile ground usually results in smaller plants, changes colour throughout the year, appearing purple during flowering in late spring/summer, golden brown during autumn, golden/bleached during winter and green in spring
Leaves: rolled, 1mm wide, bright green, feels rough when fingers run down the leaf, a 1mm white 'ligule' (flap) is present at the junction of the leaf and leaf sheath and is visible when the leaf is pulled back from the stem, this is an important identification point (see photos). When the leaf is rolled between the fingers, the blades feel perfectly round with no flat spots or bumps

Seeds: enclosed in purplish sheath, tiny, almost round, fine thread like awn attached off-centre at one end, seed heads droop to ground on maturity

Flowers: flowering stems to 95cm high

Dispersal via

- Lightweight seed carried long distances on wind
- Entire seed head snaps off and often piles up on fences
- In water and on stock
- On vehicles/machinery

Status

Serrated tussock has been listed as a Weed of National Significance due to its invasiveness, potential for spread and socioeconomic and environmental damage.

Serrated tussock is listed as a class 4 noxious weed in all council areas within the Molonglo Catchment. The growth and spread of the plant must be controlled in accordance with local management plans published by each local council and the plant must not be sold, propagated or knowingly distributed.

In the ACT, serrated tussock is a class 3 and 4 Pest Plant which must be contained and whose supply is prohibited.

Look-alikes

Native plants can often be confused with weed species. The following information aims to assist you with accurate identification to prevent the loss of our declining natives. If you are unsure what species you are dealing with, take advantage of the identification services on offer from your local weeds officer (either at your local council or the ACT's Parks, Conservation and Lands) before carrying out any controls.

There a number of other similar plants, some of which are natives and should not be removed and some of which are also weeds.

Native poa tussocks (*Poa species*) and **corkscrew grass** (*Austrostipa scabra*) can look similar but the erect seed heads stay on the plant after seed has been shed. The ligule (flap at the junction of leaf and leaf sheath) of most *Poa* species is invisible to the naked eye and under magnification it is hairy on the back.

The natives, **blown grass** (*Lachnagrostis filiformis*) and **hairy panic** (*Panicum effusum*) have seed heads which snap off and blow around, but both have wide leaves (to 5mm or so), and neither has the purple appearance of the seed heads.

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Native: corkscrew grass

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Native: corkscrew grass

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Native: corkscrew grass

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Native: poa tussock (*Poa labillardieri*)

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Native: poa tussock (*Poa labillardieri*)

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Native: poa tussock (*Poa labillardieri*)

Control methods

For advice on what time of year to implement the following management options, see the Molonglo Catchment Weed Control Calendar.

Prevention is the most desirable control, best achieved by coordinated management with neighbours (as the plant is primarily spread via wind) and restricting contaminated machinery, stock and soil from entering your property. Maintaining good groundcover is also a key management tool to prevent establishment (serrated tussock is opportunistic and will take advantage of bare ground resulting from overgrazing and drought). If the plant is detected, destroy before seeding.

Due to the persistent nature of this weed it is advised that you contact your local weeds officer for detailed control advice. Chip small infestations using a mattock, before seeding, and distribute desirable grass seeds over the bare patches created. Larger infestations require a combination of approaches and commitment to ongoing monitoring and management. Spot, boom and aerial spraying can be used. Cultivation combined with revegetation using competitive, desirable species can also produce good results. Controlled grazing and the use of fertilisers can encourage the increase of desirable species and combat infestations, however only the seedlings are vulnerable to competition. Mature plants can respond well to fertilisers so it's best avoided in established infestations. Seek advice on chemical application from your Council Weeds Officer or local 'bush friendly' nursery. Always use chemicals as directed on the label.