Coolatai Grass

Coolatai grass is an enduring tussock-forming grass that invades pastures and native vegetation. This weed has the capability to take over undisturbed ecosystems and is a threat in national parks and nature reserves.

WHAT IS COOLATAI GRASS?

Coolatai grass (Hyparrhenia hirta) is an invasive tussock-forming perennial grass that is drought, fire and herbicide tolerant. It has become a major invasive species dominating land over a range of soil types and conditions. The abundance of dry stalks and leaf matter are a dangerous fire hazard particularly on roadsides and in urban areas.

It is also one of the few grasses capable of invading roadsides and undisturbed natural ecosystems, outcompeting most other native species and makes it one of the most problematic weeds in the Mid-Western Region.

DISTRIBUTION OF COOLATAI GRASS

Infestations of Coolatai grass can be found across Australia in areas where the average annual rainfall is between 400–800mm.

Coolatai grass has the characteristics that allow it to benefit from the increased spring/summer rainfall events and milder winter temperatures.

Seeds from Coolatai grass are most commonly spread by wind, machinery, vehicles, water ways and sticking to animal's coats.

HOW TO IDENTIFY COOLATAI GRASS

Coolatai grass is a tussock grass which can grow up to 1.5m in height. Leaves are a light grey-green, which have a waxy bloom that can be rubbed off. The leaf blade is flat and 1-5mm wide. In the winter, frost will turn the leaves an orange-red. Seed heads are contained in individual pods (spatheate panicles) which vary from 15–40cm in length and consist of multiple paired branches.

CHARACTERISTICS

Growth

Coolatai grass is a perennial tussock grass that can grow up to 2 metres tall. Its main growing period is late spring and summer. Coolatai grass can be confused with similar looking native grasses, e.g. Lemon scented grasses (Cymbopogon species), Kangaroo grass (Themeda triandra) and Red-leg grass (Bothriochloa macra).

Leaves

Leaves are thin grey-green straps with a prominent midrib up to 30cm long and 0.5cm wide. Each leaf stem junction has a membranous ligule 2-4mm long.

Flowers

A pair of gray–white flower spikes (racemes) up to 5cm long forms a "V" at the end of the flowering stalks. Each raceme has 5–7 paired spikelets with a single brown awn on each pair. Coolatai grass flowers in late spring and summer.

Seeds

Each Coolatai grass plant can produce thousands of tiny sticky seeds to 2mm long which are contained within an awned hairy husk.

Images: NSW DPI

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CONTROL AND MANAGEMENT

Coolatai grass can survive fire and regular burning has been shown to have no negative effect. For effective and long term control, land owners will be required to implement various methods of control.

Identify

Learn to identify and check roadsides leading to your property along which you move stock, vehicles and machinery.

Early detection

Coolatai grass will usually start with only one or two plants. Physical removal can be done; remove, bag, dispose. A herbicide spot spray should then be carried out on the treated area.

Prevention methods

Once established, Coolatai grass is difficult to control. Avoid travelling through Coolatai grass infestations especially when plants are seeding. Ensure machinery, vehicles and clothing are cleaned down after working in a known Coolatai grass area.

Land occupiers must ensure stock, machinery and all feed and fodder entering their property has not come into any contact with infested areas. Stock should be held in a quarantine paddock for two weeks before being moved into a clean paddock. The quarantined paddock should then be monitored for any growth.

Physical control

It is essential that Coolatai grass not be allowed to set seed, mowing, slashing and strategic grazing can reduce or prevent seed set. Small infestations should be grubbed out and material appropriately disposed.

Chemical control

Glyphosate and Flupropanate may be applied to actively growing plants to aid control of Coolatai grass. Infestations may need to be slashed, mowed or burnt to remove old growth material and stimulate new active growth. Several applications may be required to achieve control of Coolatai grass.

Biological control

There are currently no known biological control agents being investigated to assist in the control of Coolatai grass. For more advice on recognising and controlling Coolatai grass, contact Council.

RESPONSIBILITY

For land owners under the Biosecurity Act 2015, you have a General Biosecurity Duty (GBD) where you are expected to, within reason know about any weeds which may impact your land. Owners should have a plan of management in place to reduce, minimise or eliminate the risk posed by weeds on your property.

When you report Coolatati grass, the infected area will be inspected Council along with a management strategy plan. A follow-up inspection will then be arranged. Council is responsible for enforcing the Biosecurity Act 2015 and its regulations. This includes fines for failure to comply with GBD.

FOR MORE INFORMATION Visit Council's website *midwestern.nsw.gov.au*, or the NSW DPI website *www.dpi.nsw.gov.au* and search 'weeds'. Council's Weeds Team are available to assist on 6378 2939 or at *weeds.admin@midwestern.nsw.gov.au*.

References: NSW DPI, www.herbiguide.com.au