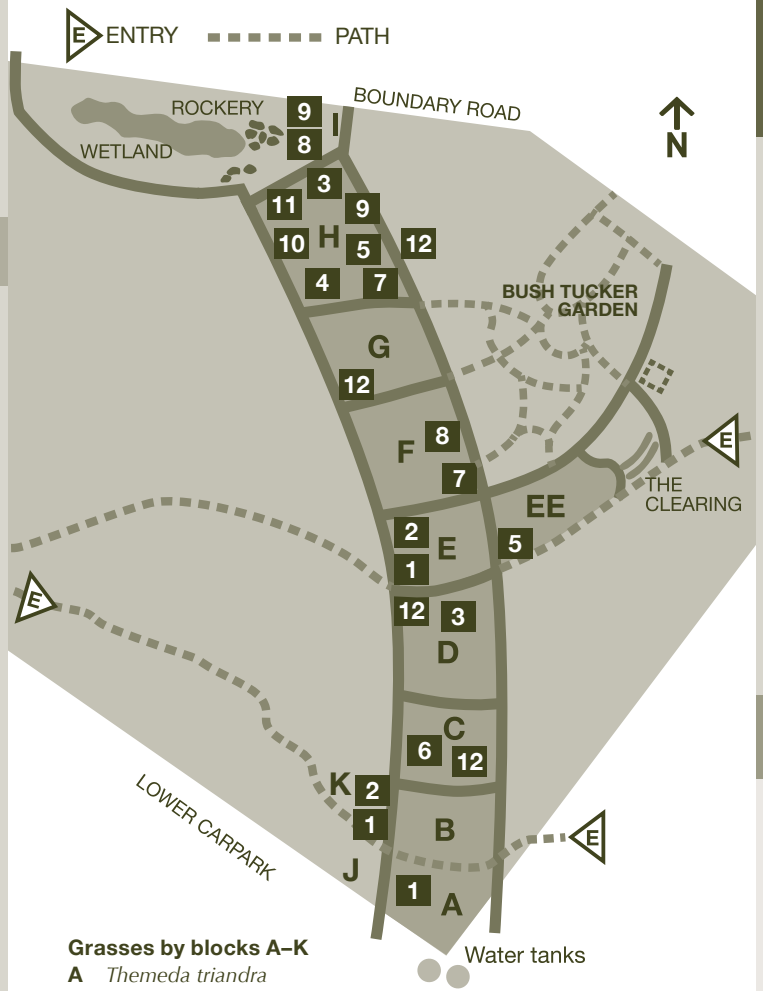
Grasses

AT THE SOUTHERN TABLELANDS
REGIONAL BOTANIC GARDEN

FOREST 20
National Arboretum Canberra



Grasses by blocks A–K

- **A** *Themeda triandra*
- **C** *Poa sieberiana, Rytidosperma pallidum*
- **D** *Microlaena stipoides, Poa sieberiana*
- **E** *Bothriochloa macra, Poa labillardierei, Themeda triandra*
- **EE** *Sorghum leiocladum, Themeda triandra*
- **F** *Austrostipa verticillata, Poa labillardierei*
- **G** *Austrostipa verticillata, Poa labillardierei, Poa sieberiana, Themeda triandra*
- **H** *Austrostipa scabra, Austrostipa verticillata, Chloris truncata, Microlaena stipoides, Poa labillardierei, Rytidosperma racemosum, Sorghum leiocladum, Themeda triandra*
- **I** *Austrostipa bigeniculata, Rytidosperma racemosum*
- **K** *Themeda triandra, Bothriochloa macra*

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SOUTHERN TABLELANDS ECOSYSTEMS PARK
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For more information visit us @ **www.STEP.asn.au**

What is STEP?
Southern Tablelands Ecosystems Park

STEP is a volunteer community group working in partnership with the National Arboretum Canberra to provide an educational, conservation and recreational resource for the community.

STEP has established a regional botanic garden at Forest 20. Twenty species of eucalyptus and other trees, typical of the Southern Tablelands region of NSW and the ACT are growing here. Many understorey species, including grasses, have been planted in the central garden.

STEP welcomes visitors to Forest 20 and invites participation in our working bees and other activities. For further information contact **secretary@step.asn.au** or visit **https://www.step.asn.au/**

Grasses at Forest 20

Early explorers described a carpet of native grasses and colourful flowering herbs, covering much of temperate south-eastern Australia. Now, these vegetation communities are substantially reduced in area and diversity through conversion to pastures and crops as well as for urban development.

A selection of grasses commonly found in the Southern Tablelands are planted in the central garden. They demonstrate both their beauty and utility in gardens and landscaped areas.

Native grasses are broadly divided into two groups depending on their dominant growing season - winter/spring or summer. In gardens, native grasses benefit from cutting back or mowing each year to promote renewal.

Some grasses introduced to Australia pose a major threat to southern tablelands ecosystems. Information on three of the most serious grass weeds is included in this leaflet to assist in their recognition.

1 *Themeda triandra*
(Kangaroo Grass)

A large tussocky grass, distinguished by its clustered seedheads, with each cluster accompanied by one or two short leaves. The mature florets are surmounted by shiny black awns, to 6cm long.

The seedheads are on slightly arching unbranched stalks, to 50cm tall. The leaves to 20cm long and 5mm wide, are flat or slightly folded, and sometimes sparsely hairy. Leaves are bright green in spring and early summer. The whole plant takes on purplish or bronzy tones in summer when flowering, and then, pinkish or pale straw-coloured tones when frosted.

A widespread species found from coastal headlands to montane grasslands and grassy woodlands. It is common only in the least disturbed sites. A drought-hardy summer-growing grass, this species makes an excellent garden plant, either massed, or as specimens. Annual pruning of dead stalks and leaves is useful to freshen up the plants.

2 *Bothriochloa macra*
(Red Grass)

This species forms short tussocks or swards, with leaves to 12cm long and 2.5mm wide.

This grass is best identified by its erect, unbranched flowering stalks to 45cm, topped by a clustered seedhead, with each floret tipped by a filamentous awn. When flowering, the whole plant takes on attractive reddish and golden hues. Fresh leaves are mid-green and sparsely hairy. A summer-growing grass, the leaves die back in winter.

Widespread in eastern and southern Australia, it withstands disturbance and can often be a component of pastures, when it can colour hillsides an attractive red. A summer-growing grass, it is useful for massed plantings or specimens. Prune off seedheads before they produce mature seeds, as in a garden setting, it can become invasive.

3 *Microlaena stipoides*
(Weeping Grass)

The most clearly distinguishing feature of this tufted spreading year-long green grass are its leaf-tips. Each has two indentations just below both sides of the tip, looking as if they have been pinched. Leaves can be green or bluish, and are often very lush.

The strongly arching (weeping) flowering stalks are to 40cm long and are tipped by clustered spikelets, each of which has one long awn (to 25mm), and another shorter.

Widespread throughout Australia, it is common in many plant communities in the Southern Tablelands, often being found in shaded habitats. In wetter regions it is a common component of pastures, being prized for its fodder value. In a garden situation, it lacks ornamental value as a specimen, however, this species makes an excellent lawn grass.

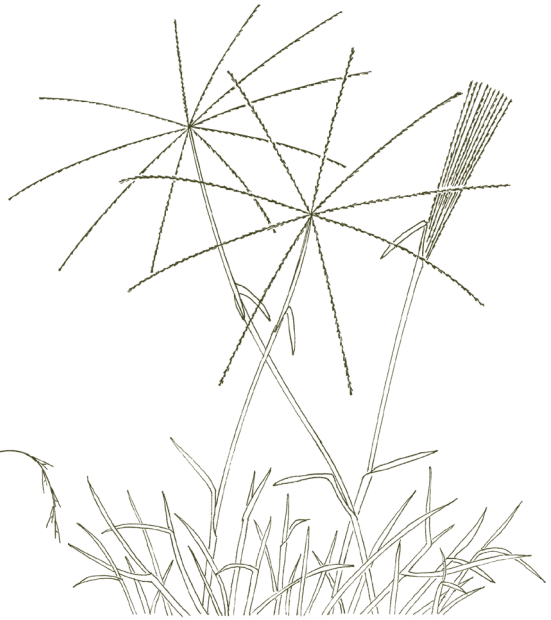
Michael Bedingfield

4 *Chloris truncata*
(Windmill Grass)

A low spreading tufted summer growing grass with hairless leaves.

Its most distinctive feature is the windmill like digitate flowerheads with six to nine arms each on a single stem. It can be an annual or short-lived perennial.

This species is widespread in the Southern Tablelands. It is suitable as a garden species.



Common names are as used on Canberra Nature Map: https://canberra.naturemapr.org

5 *Sorghum leiocladum*
(Wild Sorghum)

This grass has some similarities to both Kangaroo Grass and Red Grass. Its distinctive feature is its erect flowering stalks (to 1 metre), bearing reddish seed heads with glossy florets and silky awns.

Another distinctive feature is the “ballet-skirt” of hairs that forms at the joints along the flowering stalks.

Widespread throughout northern and eastern Australia, it is not common in the Southern Tablelands, being intolerant of disturbance. It can be found in a variety of habitats. It makes a beautiful garden specimen.

6 *Rytidosperma pallidum*
(Red-anther Wallaby Grass)

A very large dense perennial tussock grass that can grow to over 1 metre. The leaves are blue green and may be in rolled with age. Dry leaves are retained which adds to the tussock size. With its tough leaves, it is not often grazed.

Flowerheads are open panicles with distinctive orange to red anthers when it opens to fertilise.It is often a dominant species in local grassy dry forests on stony slopes.

It is found from sea level to montane and sub-alpine areas.

7 *Austrostipa verticillata*
(Slender Bamboo Grass)

An erect, tufted grass with many tall, thin, sometimes branched bamboo-like stalks (to 2 metres).

The beautiful, arching, feathery flower-heads, 15-60 cm long, are conspicuous. Its fine sharp seeds can cause irritation to grazing animals. It flowers throughout late spring, summer and autumn.

This species is uncommon. A drought-tolerant species
found in a wide range of habitats, it often occurs in moist fertile sites or in the shade of trees.

8 *Austrostipa bigeniculata*
(Kneed Speargrass)

A tall perennial tussock to 1 metre with broad leaves (to 30cm long and 5mm wide) that are often in-rolled.

The erect flowering stalks carry an open panicle. It flowers in late spring and summer. The ripe seeds have long pointed awns (to 6cm long), each with two bends (two “knees”, hence “*bigeniculata*”).

Widespread and common in pastures, grasslands and grassy woodlands in the Southern Tablelands. Although having an attractive habit, it is not really suitable for garden use, as it seeds prolifically and can be very invasive.

9 *Rytidosperma racemosum*
(Wallaby Grass)

This is one of many relatively similar wallaby grasses. It is a variable though generally erect tufted grass. The leaves are a dark green year-long and up to 20cm in length.

The seedheads are in a loose panicle that turn to cream-white as they mature.

It occurs in natural grasslands and woodlands and has persisted in grazed pastures. It is common and widespread in the southern tablelands region.

10 *Austrostipa scabra*
(Corkscrew Grass)

An erect tufted grass of up to 80cm height. The leaves are generally rough, narrow and in-rolled and remain green yearlong. They are generally rough.

It has a sparse spreading flowerhead that starts off purplish in spring, and matures to a straw colour in summer. The seeds are sharp and can be a problem for livestock, hence its common name of Corkscrew Grass.

The species is drought and frost tolerant. It is found widely across the Southern Tablelands.

Michael Bedingfield

11 *Poa labillardierei*
(Common Tussock Grass)

A tall dense tussock with leaves reaching 80cm long. The leaves are greyish green and often folded.

The flowering heads are up to 1.2m tall, topped with an open panicle to 25cm long. The spikelets are pale green in colour. Poa grasses can be confused with Serrated Tussock or African Lovegrass. Look for the fine details to distinguish them.

This is a widespread and common species, naturally occurring along drainage lines in the eastern states. It makes an excellent garden plant, either as a specimen or as massed plantings. Plants benefit from heavy pruning annually, and it is worth removing flowerheads before they go to seed, as it can become invasive.

12 *Poa sieberiana*
(Snowgrass)

Very similar to River Tussock, though with shorter leaves and flowerheads.

The spikelets are often purplish in colour.

Common Snowgrass is widespread and a common species in the Southern Tablelands, occurring in grasslands, grassy woodlands and dry and wet forests. Like River Tussock, it makes a good garden plant, with similar uses and cultural requirements.

There are a number of other snowgrasses, Short Snowgrass (*Poa meionectes*) being a particularly attractive low-growing species with bright light green leaves. It grows at higher altitudes in grassland and woodland.

Each species is designated a "Weed of National Significance".

African Lovegrass
(Eragrostis curvula)

A densely tufted and erect perennial grass growing to a height of 1.2m. The greyish green leaves are rough to the touch and the flowering stems are hairless and smooth. Persistent dead leaves on the tussock have a distinctive curled appearance. The inflorescence is an open panicle, triangular in outline, with florets steely blue-grey in colour. Flowering occurs in spring and summer.

This species is a native to Africa and is found in all Australian states, though not in the NT. It is common and widespread in our region, particularly on roadsides, in pastures and in natural areas in the Murrumbidgee Corridor. It often occurs in dense stands. It is not palatable to livestock.

Chilean Needle Grass
(Nassella neesiana)

A perennial grass related to our speargrasses. It grows as low tussock or in dense swards. The leaves are up to 30cm in length and 5mm wide. Leaves are hairless or sparsely hairy and have distinctive parallel ribs.

The purplish seedheads are in loose, drooping panicles and are sharply pointed with awns 6 to 9cm long that twist with maturity. There is a distinctive crown of short hairs at the base of each awn. Flowering occurs from October through to March. The seeds remain viable for many years.

A native of South America, this species is common and widespread in the ACT. It is a serious agricultural and environmental weed. It is drought-tolerant and persists with heavy grazing. This species is a noxious weed.

Serrated Tussock
(Nassella trichotoma)

A deep-rooted, dense, tussocky, perennial grass, reaching 50cm in height. Leaves are light green in early growth, and in winter, have pale, bleached tips.

The leaf blades are rolled and particularly rough to the touch. There is a distinctive 2.5 mm long transparent tongue-shaped "ligule" at the base of the leaf where it joins the leaf-sheath. The inflorescence is an open, drooping panicle with many fine branches. The spikelets are pale purplish in colour. Each seed has a 3cm long awn. Plants can be confused with a number of native grasses, particularly Poa and Austrostipa species. Look for the fine identifying features to separate them.

A native of South America, this species is a noxious weed in our region. A single plant may produce 100,000 seeds, which are dispersed by wind. It is unpalatable and avoided by livestock.