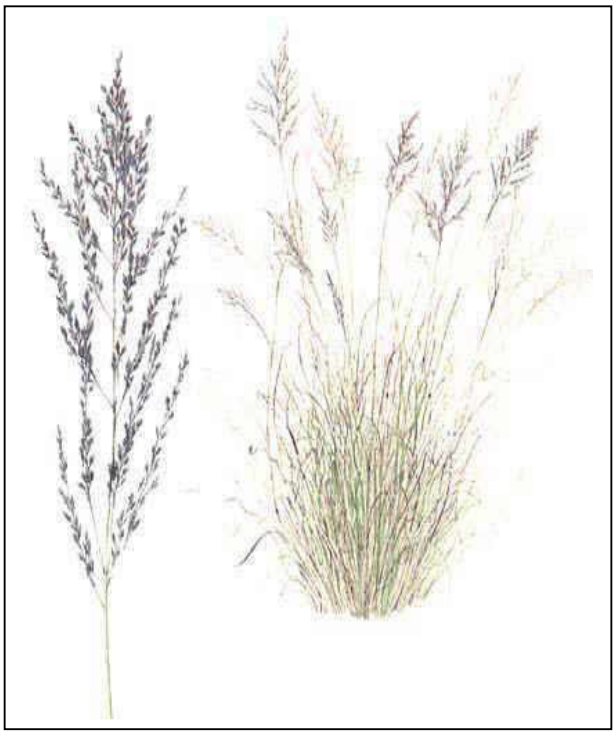
Cooma-Monaro Shire Council Noxious Weeds Fact Sheet

African Lovegrass

Eragrostis curvula



African lovegrass is a perennial tussocky noxious weed that can aggressively invade vast areas of productive farmland, urban properties and public lands.

STATUS

African Lovegrass is a class 4 noxious weed in the Cooma-Monaro Shire. The growth and spread of the plant must be controlled according to the measures specified in a management plan published by Council.

HABITAT

African lovegrass is most abundant on grasslands and some woodlands with light sandy soils. Originally planted for soil stabilisation on poor soils, African lovegrass thrives on sandy soils with low nutrient levels, roadsides and over-grazed pastures. A native of South Africa; this grass was first introduced to Australia as a potential pasture species.

The older growth of African lovegrass is less palatable and stock will avoid it while they continue to eat the other grasses. This allows African lovegrass to mature and seed while other species are continually grazed. The African lovegrass will, over time, dominate the pasture as the useful pasture species are literally eaten out of existence. The plants grow quickly in warm weather and can form dense colonies which crowd out other plants. Establishing plants can rapidly invade pastures which are overgrazed. The nutritional value is low and consequently it replaces more palatable species in grazed pasture. It is highly flammable and creates a fire hazard.

African lovegrass may also invade forest or along tracks where seeds are easily transported by vehicles and people. It is a serious weed of remnant grassy native vegetation in farming areas.

CHARACTERISTICS

The plant is generally erect, but stems may bend and sometimes bud at the lower nodes. The entire plant often adopts a weeping habit.

The narrow leaf blades are of varying lengths and are coloured bright green to blue-green. Leaves are generally without hairs, but the base has short silky hairs below outer sheaths. The leaves may be flat or rolled and usually taper to a fine curly tip. Leaves have distinct parallel veins. Where the leaf-blade joins the sheath there is usually a purple marking and a narrow yellow band on the inner and outer surfaces.

Long, white silky hairs grow from the leaf junction. The inner junction of the leaf-blade and sheath has a narrow band of hairs. The ligule has a membrane of hairs. Young stems have sheaths at the base covered with hairs. The sheaths are often purplish in colour.

The panicle inflorescence may be compact or spreading and up to 30 cm long, with herringbone arrangement of seeds. The robust, tufted leaf blades are supported by a fibrous root system contained mostly in about 50 cm depth of soil.

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 of African lovegrass requires a management program which removes the weed by cultivation or chemicals and replaces it with competitive perennial pasture species and/or trees and shrubs which provide adequate shade and moisture competition.

Keep stock away from fruiting plants. Ensure purchases of fodder, produce, stock and soils are free of weed seeds. If stock are brought from infested areas they should be kept for at least 14 days in a holding paddock that can be checked for weed seedlings later.

Continued vigilance on your property for new outbreaks is required to prevent the establishment of weeds. The key to controlling any weed population is to prevent the plants from reproducing and encouraging strong competition. For African lovegrass, this means preventing seed production. The methods suggested below should be carefully timed to achieve this goal.

MECHANICAL CONTROL

- Cultivation and cropping can give good control.
- Hand hoe small infestations before seeds form and dispose of plants by burning.
- Burning of infestations can stimulate fresh growth; this can then be controlled by heavy grazing or herbicide however the efficacy of herbicides is often reduced whilst charcoal is present following burning. Competitive species are also removed by burning so the establishment of a dense pasture must follow any burning exercise.

PASTURE IMPROVEMENT

Pasture improvement or periods of cropping on arable land may effectively control African lovegrass. Cropping prior to pasture improvement can assist expelling soil seedbed reserves.

Establishing pastures may be spray-topped to control recruiting seedlings. The management of improved pastures (including fertility maintenance and careful grazing) is essential to having healthy and productive competition to African lovegrass.

BIOLOGICAL CONTROL

No insects or pathogens are available as biological control agents for African lovegrass in Australia.

CHEMICAL CONTROL (as per NSW Agriculture Noxious & Environmental Weed Control Handbook 2004/2005)

Flupropanate 745g/L - Various trade names
Spot spray application with 200-300 ml in 100L of water.
Boom spray application with 2-3 L/ha

Glyphosate 360g/L - Various trade names
1.0 L in 100 L of water for spot spray or 6 L per hectare for boom spray application.
Apply to actively growing plants.
For re-treatment or pasture improvement to restrict seedling establishment.

Sulfometuron - Oust ®
40 to 80 g per 100 L of water for spot spray.
400 to 800 g per hectare
Apply evenly to foliage. Spray to point of wet.

Mark isolated infestations with a stake to allow checking and re-treatment as needed. Use a dye to indicate areas controlled.

All the above control treatments must be applied persistently; do not miss a year until the African lovegrass infestation is eradicated.

READ THE LABEL BEFORE USING ANY HERBICIDE

ENSURE SPRAY EQUIPMENT IS CORRECTLY CALIBRATED AND MAINTAINED

FURTHER INFORMATION

Contact Cooma-Monaro Shire Council Weeds Officers (ph: 64501777, fax: 64501799) or NSW Agriculture or Landcare