Green Tips

Greening Australia
Northern Territory Inc.

growingthefuturetogether

Native Grasses

Identification

Key features useful in grass identification include characteristics associated with:

- the bracts (lemma and palea) which enclosed the grass seed
- the glumes which enclose the seedhead
- the nature of the leaves including the leaf base
- the ancillary structures associated with the floret which vary widely, from bristles to awns, and play roles in seed protection and germination.

What species of seed?

The following are a number of native grasses that are useful as pasture species for a wide variety of rangeland habitats.

- *Astrebla pectinata* (Barley Mitchell Grass) – suitable for clay loams and cracking clay soils.
- *Astrebla squarrosa* (Bull Mitchell) – robust perennial suitable for clay soils.
- *Dichanthium sericeum* (Queensland Bluegrass) – suitable for grey clay and alluvial soils.
- *Eulalia aurea* (Silky Browntop) – suitable for clay and clay loam soils.
- *Heteropogon contortus* (Bunched Spear Grass) – a good pioneer species for a range of sites. Prefers loam and clay loam soils.
- *Iseilema vaginiflorum* (Red Flinders Grass) – widespread annual occurring on clay soils often with Mitchell grass.
- *Panicum decompositum (Native Millet)* – for clay loams and heavier soils in low lying areas.
- *Themeda triandra (Kangaroo Grass)* – widespread perennial for well drained sandy – clay soils.

For information about suitable species for your particular area contact your nearest Greening Australia NT office.

Seed Collection

The timing of ripening seed depends on many factors, such as rainfall and temperature, but generally in the Top End the seed is ready for harvest in the latter part of the Wet Season. For example, if you require Barley Mitchell Grass, it is usually harvested 8 weeks after summer rains. In general, seed can be collected using a brush harvester, hand-held harvester or can be hand picked.

Seed Cleaning Techniques

Dry the collected material on a tarpaulin and shake to release any seeds that have not dropped. Ancillary structures that surround some seeds may make seed cleaning difficult but evidence shows that for example, the hygroscopically active awns found on *Heteropogon* and *Themeda* species assist propagation by moving the seed to a favourable position on the soil surface for successful germination. Thus, careful handling and storage of seeds is important for a successful outcome to your rehabilitation project.

Seed Storage

Store the seed in bags in cool, dry conditions, with a constant moisture level. Make sure you record information such as species name, where the seed was collected, and the date of collection. Seed should also be treated with carbon dioxide to eliminate insect activity.

Seed Treatment

Insects: If the area to be seeded has high ant activity, it may pay to coat the seed with a low toxicity pyrethrum based insecticide such as some of the tomato dusts.

Seed dormancy: Some seeds need a certain period of storage to overcome their dormancy before they can be sown. For example, *Astrebla pectinata* (Barley Mitchell Grass) needs to be stored 8 – 10 months before it will germinate.

Seed Sowing

It is important to prepare the site properly before you sow the seed. Issues of weed control, seed bed preparation, and fire control need to be addressed before sowing commences.