

# ***Enneapogon nigricans***

## **Common name – Bottle Brush Grass**

**Enneapogon nigricans** (Bottlebrush grass) is a very upright, perennial tussock grass. It generally grows to 55cm high and 20cm wide. The upright stalks have few bearded nodes and occasionally branched. They typically have a tall erect flowering head. The plants die down in late summer, before reshooting when the rains return. They can survive drought but not frost. They are also known as Nine-awn grass, Blackheads, Shuttlecock grass, Octopus grass and Bottle Washers.

*Enneapogon nigricans* is widespread in South Australia. It grows in the woodlands and grasslands of the eastern and western foothills and not usually found in the high rainfall forests. Plants like sunny positions and generally grow in mallee forests. They grow mostly on shallow soils over a variety of rock substrates (limestone in the mallee, granite, basalt and sediments elsewhere).



### **Leaves**

Leaves are light green, smooth and flat or rolled inwards and 15 cm long and 2.5 mm wide. The stalks die back to a straw colour. There are new green leaves all year but, in winter, the tussocks are low and not very visible.

The leaves are short, pale green or blue green, with an abrupt taper at the tip (boat shaped). They are narrow, 50–140 mm long and 1–5 mm wide. New leaves are folded.

### **Flowers**

In grasses, the flowering unit is called a spikelet. It is made up of a number of parts including husks (petals) and florets (small flowers that produce the seeds). These florets have a number of bracts, the lowest, the lemmas, usually have awns or bristles growing out of them. In Bottlebrush grass, the spikelets occur in a dense, distinctive lance-shaped group at the top of wiry stalks over 30 cm long, resembling bottle brushes. These appear in late spring and summer and starts off green, turn blackish when mature fade to a straw colour.

When mature, the spikelets, now seedheads, are 1–9 cm long and 1–1.5 cm wide and resemble bottlebrushes. They are made up of a dense collection of spikelets. Each spikelet usually has a fertile and a sterile seed.



In Bottlebrush grass, the outer scales (lemmas) each have nine distinctive spikes (awns) about twice as long as the lemmas. As a result, the seed (mature floret) looks like an octopus or a hairy badminton shuttlecock around 5mm across. This seed is unique and distinctive as no introduced species produce seeds that look like these. Germination is slow and unreliable and requires warm temperatures.

### **Interesting Facts**

The grass has a moderate tolerance to grazing with a high forage value