

Elymus scaber

Common name – Common Wheat Grass

Elumos, old Greek for a kind of grain; scaber- Latin for rough or gritty to the touch

Elymus scaber (Common Wheat grass) is an open tufted, perennial grass with an erect or often drooping flower stalk up to 1m tall. Typically, the flower head is up to 15 cm long and when young, resembles wheat. It is an all-year green or bluish green, native perennial grass that persists well. The grass grows from 30 to 100 cm high with leaves in a sparse tuft at the base. It flowers from late spring to summer. Other common names are Rough Wheatgrass or Native Wheatgrass.



Common Wheat grass is found in all Australian states except the Northern Territory and is more common in districts with cool winters. It is frost tolerant remaining green in the coldest conditions and produces quality forage in late winter and early spring. It is grazed heavily at this time resulting in the grass making up only a small percentage of mature stands of native grasses. It grows naturally in shaded and open areas of grasslands and grassy woodlands. It tolerates dry conditions, grows on various soil types from sand to clay-loams and in a wide range of soils from mildly acidic to alkaline.

Leaves

The leaves are narrow, rough along the edges and half-twist. The base of the leaves has a distinctive clasping collar (ligule). Leaf sheaths are often purplish. The leaf surface may be smooth, rough or softly hairy, but not shiny.

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 the Common Wheat grass, the spikelets have 6 – 12 florets coming off the 50cm – 1m flowering stalk. When mature each floret produces a seed with a long

evenly-curved awn (bristle). The spikelets (flower heads) are slender and look like a herring-bone due to the outward bend of the mature straw-coloured awns.

The awns have a tiny saw-like edge in one direction but smooth in the other. This enables the seeds to easily attach, hang on and work their way in, so the seeds can often remain entangled in a group when they drop from the stem. Seeds have a 6-month after-ripening period. The grass flowers from July to December but flowering may continue spasmodically throughout summer and autumn depending on seasonal conditions.



Uses

Traditionally, the tough, wiry stems of *Elymus scaber* were used to make string and rope for various purposes such as weaving baskets, nets, and traps. These items were essential for collecting food and for general domestic use.

Common Wheat grass is moderately important as a fodder grass with 10-36% crude protein when green, and moderate to high digestibility. One of first native grasses to grow in spring, providing early green forage. An attractive, useful grass for both pasture and revegetation. Revegetation is one of the best uses because Wheat grass establishes rapidly and has high seedling vigour. This native pasture grass is incredibly versatile. Many farmers have been successfully using Wheat grass as a cover crop to accompany a slower growing grass such as Wallaby grass. Seed can injure eyes and contaminates wool.

The grass is sought after by butterflies as an important food source

The trees can be harvested from the wild for local use as a food, medicine and source of materials. They are regarded as having reasonably good prospects as a crop plant for high volume wood production. The seeds, when cooked, are considered to have potential as a source of human food.

The species is sometimes used for windbreaks and revegetation especially along road verges.