

***Austrostipa* sp.**

Common name – Spear Grass

Austro- Greek means "southern" and "stipos," Greek means "straw" or "stalk."

Austrostipa species (spear grasses) grow naturally in temperate regions in Australasia. There are a large number of different grasses in this genus.

The “spear” come from the fact that all these grasses produce spikelets with a single seed each having one awn, or bristle, attached.

Many make up important parts of native pastures. They grow in dry eucalypt forest, woodlands, scrublands, in low open forests, grasslands and along coastlines. These grasses often occur in shallow soils of low fertility in areas of high summer temperatures.

They are able to survive and remain green even under dry, hot summer conditions. One of the most common at the wetland is the elegant spear grass (*Austrostipa elegantissima*).



Austrostipa elegantissima

Spear grasses are cool season, tufted perennial grasses. The leaves grow from 10 to 30 cm high with stems reaching from 0.5 to 1.5 metres depending on the species. The culms (stems) of *Austrostipa* are often slender and wiry. Leaves are usually long, narrow, and often rolled or folded, with a sharp tip.

Flowers

Most species flower from late spring to early summer, while some can flower from late winter to early summer. 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 ones, (lemmas), usually have awns or bristles growing out of them.

In all spear grasses, the spikelets (flowerheads) vary between the species. Most are attractive, feathery and vary in length and width. Each spikelet has a single small seed with one, long twisted awn or bristle and the seed, itself, resembles the tip of the spear. Seeds are spread by wind or attaching to the fur of animals.



Left:
Austrostipa elegantissima
- seed head



Right - *Austrostipa nodosa*
- seed head

Seed Heads

Spear grass is mainly used as fodder when it is young. It can be grazed or cut for hay or silage. Once flowering occurs, its overall nutritive value declines and the sharp-pointed seeds and tangled awns may injure animals and humans. Many types of Spear grass seeds are known to cause problems, especially contamination of wool. Stock should be withdrawn while seeding occurs.