

# ***Themeda triandra***

## **Common name – Kangaroo Grass**

*Themeda* - *Arabic* thaemed - 'a rain filled depression that dries out in summer'  
*triandra* - *Latin* 'tri & 'andrus' meaning three males - flowers have three stamens.

**Themeda triandra** (Kangaroo grass) is a native perennial grass, that has an extraordinarily wide range from the mountains of New Guinea to Tasmania and from the east to the west of the Australian continent. Patches occur across the whole of the arid and semi-arid regions of Australia. It is also known as Red Oat grass.

*Kangaroo grass* occurs on a wide variety of soils from sandy to heavy clays. It is common in areas where water collects such as along roadsides or railway lines. It grows with a wide range of other grasses and shrubs. Kangaroo grass grows typically in situations where grazing disturbance is low and where fires occur periodically. It is a vital component of many Australian ecosystems and has significant cultural and ecological importance.

The grass also plays an important role in the nutrient cycling and soil health of these ecosystems. it is very drought-resistant and tolerates extreme changes in temperature.

Kangaroo grass typically grows to a height of 0.5 to 1.5 meters and can form large tussocks that have been known to live to 50 years. The new leaves of the tussocks are green to grey and turn to orange brown in summer. They are 10-50 cm long and 2-5 mm wide.



*Typical look of a plant with mature seed heads*

## **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). Kangaroo grass flowers from December to February.

## **Seed Heads**

The seed heads form distinctive feathery large red-brown spikelets up to 30 cm long. They are held well above the leaves and occur on branched stems. They have long distinguishing leaf-like bracts at their base and bare florets.

Seeds have a sharp barb at their base. They are dark brown with a dark brown crooked awn (4 to 7 cm tail) attached to each seed. Generally, the seeds have a dormancy period of up to 12 months depending on the area. Fire or temperatures of 40–45° C may break dormancy.

Only about 1/3 of the seeds will be fertile. It is sometimes hard to distinguish fertile from infertile seeds as they both turn brown and retain their awns but generally fertile seeds are larger. After rain and as the humidity changes, the awns attached to the seeds 'come alive' and twist and wiggle, drilling the seed into the soil. It's amazing to watch.



## **Uses**

Kangaroo grass has significant cultural importance to many Indigenous Australian communities. It has been used for food, medicine, and fibre for thousands of years. The grass is also an important part of many Indigenous creation stories and ceremonies.

Kangaroo grass is a useful plant for land management and restoration, particularly in degraded ecosystems. It is drought-tolerant and can help prevent soil erosion. The grass is also a good food source for livestock.