

## GRASSES IN OUR AREA – DO YOU KNOW THE DIFFERENCE?

... *Bill McKellar*

... *Drawings Ruth Hurst*

The precise identification of grasses is complex, which you can appreciate if you refer to the description of grasses of the genus *Danthonia* on pp. 527 ff. of *Flora Victoria Vol 2, 1994* (a copy is in the ANGAIR library). These descriptions follow the taxonomy developed using work of J. W. Vickery, formerly Senior Botanist at the National Herbarium of New South Wales (1964–1968). More recent work has led to Australian species, of which there are about twenty-eight, being moved to the new genus *Austrodanthonia*, a member of the family Poaceae. The genus name, *Danthonia*, is derived from the 19C French botanist, Etienne Danthoine.

This article provides a simplified description for newcomers to grasses, specifically, of three Wallaby Grasses of the eight *Austrodanthonia* species found in our area, and details some of the difference from other common grasses, the *Poas*.

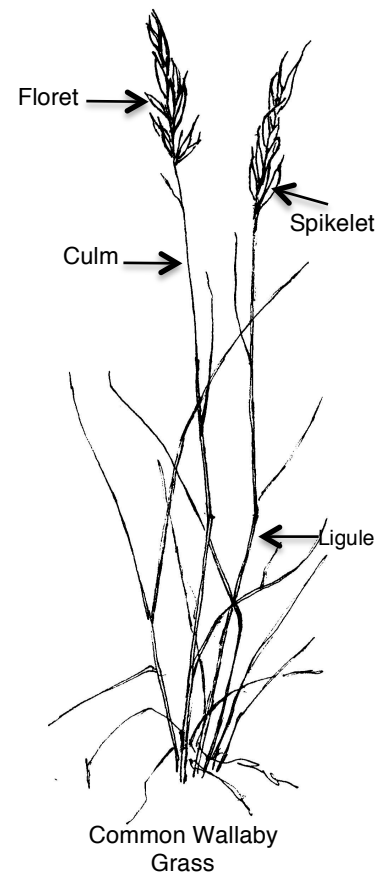
Australian grasses are all deep-rooted perennials, while introduced grasses are usually shallow-rooted annuals, so if you cannot pull it out of the ground readily by hand, it's most likely indigenous.

*Austrodanthonia* is widespread in grassland and forest, from southern Australia to New Guinea. They form small tussocks and are highly nutritious. They have bisexual flowers or florets. The seed can easily be removed by gently pulling at the flowers. They also have awns (fine attachments on the seeds). The awns are usually brown, about 1 cm long and twisted.

Wallaby grasses are different from Tussock Grasses *Poas* as they have hairy ligules (the junction at the stalk and leaf blade), whereas *Poas* do not. Further, *Poas* generally form larger, denser tussocks, with softer and denser flowers, and are without awns on the seed.

### Common Wallaby Grass *Austrodanthonia caespitosa*

*A. caespitosa* is the largest of the Wallaby Grasses. The leaves are about 30 cm long and 1–3 mm wide. The culms (flowering stalks) grow to 90 cm. The spikelets (consists of one or more florets and is the basic unit of the inflorescence in grasses) are 12–20 mm long, sparse, and often purple with 6–9 florets.



### Bristly wallaby grass *Austrodanthonia setacea*

This is an 'open' plant. Leaves are to 25 cm, mildly inrolled, and 1 mm wide. The culms are 60 cms high, with purple spikelets from 10–15 mm, and 4–10 florets.

**Knead wallaby grasses *Austrodanthonia geniculata*** (*geniculata* means 'bent like a knee').

*A. geniculata* is a slender, low grass. The leaves grow to 15 cm, are slightly inrolled and to 1 mm in width. Culms are 20–40 cms, with a bend, like a knee, near the base. Short spikelets are 6–10 mm, with 3–5 florets.

Thanks to Carl Rayner for his comments.

References:

- Walsh, N.G. and Entwisle, T.J. 1994. *Flora of Victoria*, vol. 2. Inkata Press, Melbourne.  
Elliott, W.R. and Jones, D.L. [1986] - *Encyclopaedia of Australian Plants Suitable for Cultivation*. Volume 3 (Ce-Er). Lothian Publishing, Port Melbourne.



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