Fact Sheet: African Lovegrass

Plant Identification

Tom's Creek Landcare

Key Features

Loose branched seed head

Seed heads branch out into a loose pyramid shape 6-30cm tall, with tiny seeds at the tips.

Weeping tussock growth

Plants grow as a densely tufted tussock with long, fine leaves which curl or 'weep' at the ends.

Finely serrated leaves

The leaves feel rough or 'sandpapery' if you run your finger along the edge, due to tiny serrations.

Hairs at leaf base

Where the leaf blade meets the stem there is a distinct ring of very fine white hairs, called a ligule.

Dense fibrous root system

Fine, tough roots form a dense fibrous root system down to 50cm which binds tightly to soil.

Overview

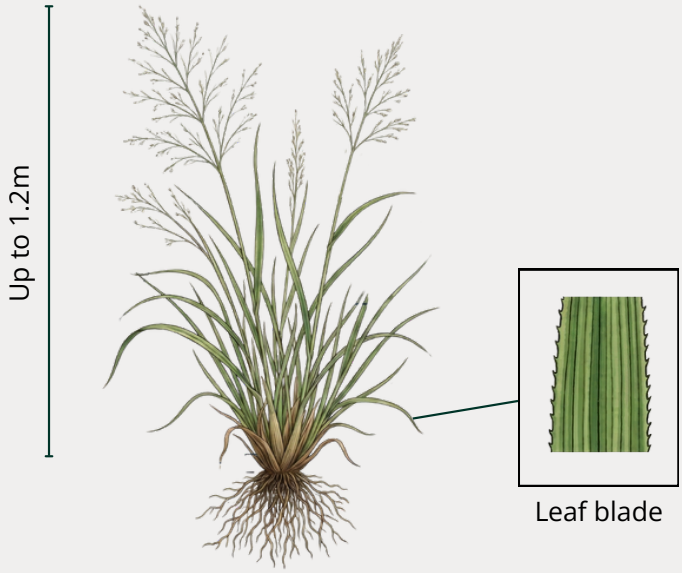
Successful weed management begins with accurate identification. In the diverse landscapes of East Gippsland, African Lovegrass (ALG) often hides in plain sight.

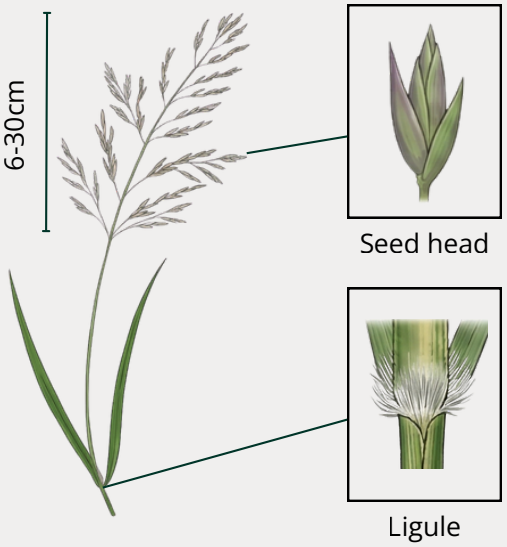
Favouring acidic, sandy soils, with a tolerance for low and erratic rainfall, plants are often found on disturbed or degraded land, especially along road and railways.

This poses an infestation risk to neighbouring landowners if not managed early and regularly. Additionally, grazing pastures may contain other 'good' tussock grasses which look similar to ALG, making early identification difficult for landowners.

By learning to recognise the key identification features of African Lovegrass, we can work to protect East Gippsland's productivity and biodiversity.

Identifying African Lovegrass

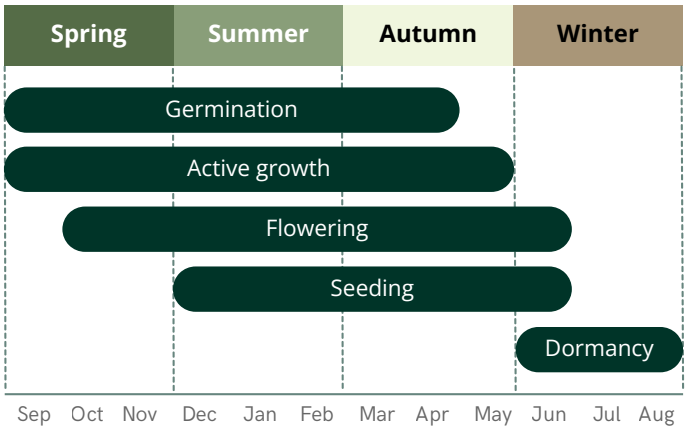




Growth Habit

African Lovegrass remains dormant when soil temperatures are below 10°C, typical during East Gippsland winters. In summer when many common pasture grasses have yellowed off, ALG may retain its colour. It also responds to moisture much faster than many desirable temperate pasture species, and exhibits a post-rain green-up making infestations highly visible.

In southern Australia there are two main documented flush periods; Autumn and Spring. In the early growth stages the leaves can be deceptively soft, making it difficult to pick out in a lush pasture. As the plant grows, it builds a tough, fibrous structure to survive the summer heat. This results in the leaves feeling rough or serrated, or 'sandpapery'.



Like any weed, the earlier African Lovegrass is identified, the easier it is to manage. Infestations often go unchecked in public areas such as parks, roadsides, and along waterways, presenting a high risk of spread to neighbouring farmland.

Where plants are regularly mown or slashed they may establish a flat, horizontal growth pattern. Leaves of these plants may remain soft like juvenile plants, and seed heads can produce smaller, finer growth.

In the Field

The most prominent identifier of African Lovegrass from a distance is the tall, open seed head which often stands above the native or introduced pastures of East Gippsland. Due to its unpalatability to stock, especially once mature, selective grazing can make plants and seed heads more visible.

African Lovegrass seed head at different stages of maturity.

Relying solely on seed heads for identification means plants have already reached a reproductive stage. Developing the skill to recognise young plants early in the season helps ensure infestations are treated or removed before they can contribute new seeds to the soil bank. This means looking at the plant's colour, and recognising the small, soft leaves of young plants.

For more information