



Native Bluegrasses *Bothriochloa* species and *Dichanthium* species

What do they look like? Bluegrasses are strong, perennial grasses with blue-green leaves and soft seed heads with short, soft, dark brown-black awns (seed casing) projecting from the head. Awns are not as long as in black speargrass. Native *Bothriochloa* species leaves smell of turpentine when crushed and are related to the introduced Indian Couch/Bluegrass (*Bothriochloa pertusa*). Native Bluegrasses are prized by land managers because of their usefulness to stock.

Where do they live? They occur throughout the region, but are more likely to be found on heavier clay or texture contrast soils (clay-loams, clay-sands) of box and ironbark woodlands.

What do they need to live, eat and breed? Bluegrasses are considered to be 3P grasses (Perennial, Productive and Palatable), and also grazing 'decreasers'. That is, they are selectively grazed by cattle and are thereby prone to decrease in abundance and yield when overgrazed.

When might I see them? Bluegrasses are most obvious when seeding, usually between March and May. These perennial species flower and set seed in response to wet season rains. Usually, the blue-green new leaf growth is stimulated by the first wet season rains, and depending on the species, flower stalks are produced a few weeks later.

What management actions affect this species? Native Bluegrasses are palatable and nutritious for stock. Overgrazing causes declines in Native Bluegrasses and favours more 'weedy' increaser native species (e.g. *Aristida* spp.), and the introduced Indian Couch which is a heavy grazing increaser that replaces Native Bluegrasses. Wet season spelling and conservative grazing practices will enable these valuable species to persist. Managing fire can also be important for Native Bluegrasses. Occasional, early dry season fires are the least damaging. Conversely, repeated annual burning reduces the ability of the grasses to build biomass and reduces seed set.

How do they benefit the land I manage? As well as their obvious value as cattle fodder, bluegrasses provide food and thick shelter for numerous ground-dwelling animals, especially native mammals such as dunnarts and bettongs. The thick, tufted growth habit of bluegrasses slows the passage of water across the landscape, reducing erosion and increasing infiltration. Bluegrasses also produce a large amount of leaf and stem mulch, further adding to soil health.

