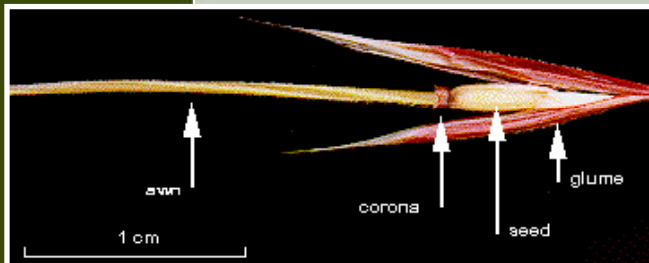


**Chilean needle grass  
is a Weed of  
National Significance!**

## CHILEAN NEEDLE GRASS

*(Nassella neesiana)*

Chris Cooper and Mark Gardener

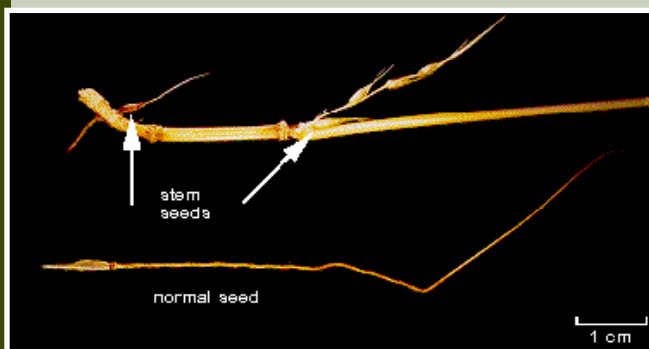


*Weed: Chilean needle grass seed with glumes still attached.*

Note the corona between the awn and the seed. Native spear grasses don't have this corona

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Chris Cooper and Mark Gardener



*Weed: Chilean needle grass has stem seeds (top) and normal seeds (bottom).*

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Andrew Paget



*Weed: Chilean needle grass*

Jackie Miles/Max Campbell



*Weed: Chilean needle grass*

### *Why is Chilean needle grass a weed?*

- Very invasive in pasture and on roadsides and other waste ground
- Well established around Canberra where it has been widely spread on road verges by slashing, and is invading other areas of the tablelands
- Tolerates drought and a wide range of soil types and climatic conditions
- Tolerates heavy grazing however there is little leaf material and therefore most of the plant is not palatable to livestock and can replace more useful pasture grasses (i.e. can reduce carrying capacity)
- Invades native grasslands and grassy woodlands

### *Description*

**Plant:** a tall grass to 1m high, joints of the flowering stems are bent with fine short white hairs

**Leaves:** dark green flat to slightly in-rolled ribbed leaves to 5mm wide, tend to droop as they grow longer, while native spear grasses retain straight, more erect leaves

**Seeds:** sharply pointed and red or purplish when young, 6-10mm long, with a long (6-9cm) awn (tail) attached at the top end of the seed. Best distinguishing feature: membranous collar (corona) where awn attaches to the seed (this may need magnification to be visible). Awns twist when mature and may tangle together. This grass can also produce seed hidden within the bases of the flowering stems

### *Dispersal via*

- Sharp-pointed seeds attach to animals and clothing and are spread from place to place
- In soil on machinery and vehicles
- Most spread on the Southern Tablelands has been by roadside slashing

### *Status*

Chilean needle grass is listed as a class 4 noxious weed in all council areas within the Molonglo Catchment. The growth and spread of the plant must be controlled in accordance with local management plans published by each local council and the plant must not be sold, propagated or knowingly distributed.

In the ACT, Chilean needle grass is a class 3 and 4 Pest Plant which must be contained and whose supply is prohibited.

Chilean needle grass has been listed as a Weed of National Significance due to its invasiveness, potential for spread and socioeconomic and environmental damage.

Fact sheets are available from the Molonglo Catchment Group website. Visit [www.molonglocatchment.com.au](http://www.molonglocatchment.com.au) or call 6128 3376 for more information about getting involved in your living environment.

Information used to compile this fact sheet was kindly provided by the Southern Tablelands and South Coast Noxious Plants Committee: [www.southeastweeds.org.au](http://www.southeastweeds.org.au)



## Look-alikes

Native plants can often be confused with weed species. The following information aims to assist you with accurate identification to prevent the loss of our declining natives. If you are unsure what species you are dealing with, take advantage of the identification services on offer from your local weeds officer (either at your local council or the ACT's Parks, Conservation and Lands) before carrying out any controls.

Many native spear grasses have similar pointed seeds with a long, curved or twice-bent awn but many have very narrow leaves. The most similar is **tall spear grass** (*Austrostipa bigeniculata*) which also has broad leaves. It has a few short erect hairs at the seed/awn junction but not a membranous collar. Many of these spear grasses, like the **corkscrew grass** (*Austrostipa scabra*) also have a red appearance when the seed is young.

Another similar native is the **double-jointed spear grass** (*Austrostipa stuposa*) which has a similar collar of long hairs at the seed/awn junction.

Jackie Miles/Max Campbell



Native: tall spear grass

Jackie Miles/Max Campbell



Native: corkscrew grass

Jackie Miles/Max Campbell



Native: double-jointed spear grass

## Control methods

For advice on what time of year to implement the following management options, see the Molonglo Catchment Weed Control Calendar.

Seek advice on chemical application from your Council Weeds Officer or local "bush friendly" nursery. Always use chemicals as directed on the label.

The priority for Chilean needle grass is to avoid introduction in new areas by ensuring contaminated vehicles don't enter your property and machinery is kept clean if moving from infested areas.

Combining control methods, including physical removal, herbicide application, crop rotation, pasture sowing and grazing management will produce the best results once an area has become infested.

Dig or spray small infestations, preferably before the plants have a chance to set seed. Seed is long-lived in the soil so prevention of seeding is vital. Mowing with a catcher mower during flowering will reduce seed set but the clippings must be burnt (and mowing will only be partially effective as it won't remove the seeds hidden within the bases of flowering stems). Consult the Rural Fire Service for permits and advice before using fire as part of your management methods; in urban areas also contact the local council/control authority - your local weeds officer can assist with the safe disposal of Chilean needle grass plants.

Research is currently being conducted on biological controls however there has not yet been a release. Due to the persistent nature of this weed it is advised that you contact your local weeds officer for detailed control advice.