

photo: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/davewophoto/5429531710/sizes/l/in/>



Austrostipa scabra



photo: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/craters/493370139/>

Austrostipa scabra is a medium-sized cool to warm season perennial C3 grass [7, 8]. The fine but scabrid (rough to touch) leaves form a somewhat slender tussock. The loosely spreading seedhead contains narrow florets, each with a very fine sickle-shaped to corkscrew-shaped awn, hence the common name of Corkscrew [4].

Population map:
www.ala.org.au/explore/species-maps/

Natural Populations

Austrostipa scabra occurs in all States [5]. It is widespread in drier areas, growing on rocky outcrops and lighter textured well-drained clay loam soils, where it is most common on low ground cover and little soil depth [6, 8]. It also occurs on gentle slopes in flat-undulating country and open grassy woodlands [9].



photo: C. Miller

Flowering and Seeds

Flowering occurs in spring and summer [2, 7].

The many seeds in *A. scabra* seedheads can be harvested when dark brown and hard, but watch carefully as seed sheds quickly over a couple of days [1]. Using gloves to protect from the spiky seeds, *A. scabra* seed can be harvested by running hands upwards along the seed-head [1]. Most *Austrostipa* species show dormancy and have an after-ripening period, so seed may need to be stored for up to 11 months before they will germinate [1].

Cultivation and Uses

Propagation can be by seed or division [2]. This species is suitable for direct seeding but can also be grown as tubestock depending on requirements.

A. scabra is highly drought and frost tolerant [8]. In gardens, it is a graceful small grass for planting under trees or for use in rockeries [6].

This species can be grazed. It has low to moderate grazing value, with a green-leaf digestibility of less than 60% and a crude protein range of 3-17% [8]. Although it is productive in early spring and summer, it is palatable only when young as it produces a lot of unpalatable, poor quality dead leaves later in the season [8]. It does not respond well to fertiliser and tends to

decline under fertiliser and clover application when competition with exotic species increases [8]. The seed is sharp and can be hazardous to sheep, penetrating fleeces and skin or causing eye damage [8]. *A. scabra* is more suited to light grazing, as it also declines at higher stocking rates unless rested at flowering [8]. To reduce seed contamination of fleece, it can be heavily grazed or slashed at early flowering, but as this can reduce the populations over time [8], a better option is to remove stock from *A. scabra* dominated areas before seeding occurs and return stock when the plants are productive and palatable again. This way the perennial tussocks will build up and assist to increase soil quality, and grazing can occur at the most productive time before dead

litter builds up and without seed hazards. *A. scabra* provides food for seed eating birds such as finches [6]. Moths and butterflies are also attracted [3].



photo: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/sixdos/5253386357/>

To source seeds or plants:
www.grassywoodlands.org.au

References

- [1] Ralph, M. (1999). *Seed Collection of Australian Native Plants: for revegetation, tree planting and direct seeding*. 2nd ed. Bushland Horticulture.
- [2] Walker, K., Burrows, G., and McMahon, L. (2001). *Bidgee Bush, An identification guide to common native plants species of the South Western Slopes of New South Wales*. Greening Australia, South West Slopes.
- [3] Stelling, F. (ed.) (1998). *South West Slopes Revegetation Guide*. Murray Catchment Management Committee, Albury, NSW.
- [4] Eddy, D., Mallinson, D., Rehwinkel, R. and Sharp, S. (1998). *Grassland Flora - a field guide for the Southern Tablelands (NSW&ACT)*. Canberra, ACT.

Internet links

- [5] PlantNET National Herbarium of New South Wales: <http://plantnet.rbgsyd.nsw.gov.au/cgi-bin/NSWfl.pl?page=nswfl&lvl=s&p&name=Austrostipa~scabra>
- [6] Yarra Ranges Local Plant Directory: http://www.yarraranges.vic.gov.au/Residents/Yarra_Ranges_Plant_Directory/Lower_Storey/Grasses_Rushes_and_Sedges/Austrostipa_scabra_ssp__falcata
- [7] Native Grass Species in South Australia: http://www.dtei.sa.gov.au/_data/assets/word_doc/0003/35634/2419759-v2-Environment-Technical_Standards_-_Native_Grasses_Technical_Notes_-_Part_2-_Native_Grass_Species_in_SA.DOC
- [8] NSW Department of Primary Industry: <http://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/agriculture/field/pastures-and-rangelands/native-pastures/native-grasses---tablelands/rough-speargrass-or-corkscrew-grass>
- [9] Australian National Botanic Gardens & Australian National Herbarium, Harden Species List: <http://www.anbg.gov.au/greening-grainbelt/harden-species-list.xls>