



# Cymbopogon refractus



*Cymbopogon refractus* is a clump-forming perennial warm season grass 1 m in height when in flower [4]. It is most notable for its seedheads, which look like barbed-wire, hence the name: **Barbed Wire Grass**. Other common names are **Lemon Scented Grass** [6], **Turpentine Grass** and **Kangaroo Grass** [1].

Population map:

[www.ala.org.au/explore/species-maps/](http://www.ala.org.au/explore/species-maps/)

## Natural Populations

*Cymbopogon refractus* grows widely across eastern Australia in Qld, NSW, Vic and N.T. [6].

It grows in woodlands and grasslands in full sun to partial shade [5]. It is widespread on poor or low nutrient soils [3, 4] but also grows in a wide range of soil textures from sands to clays [4, 6]. It is sometimes found in drier inland locations on lighter soils and stony slopes [6] and along the edge of watercourses. It does not survive set stocking or intense grazing [6].

*C. refractus* has become naturalised on many Pacific islands [6].

## Flowering and Seeds

*C. refractus* flowers mostly from spring to autumn [3]. Seed should be collected by hand or with a mechanical harvester.

## Cultivation and Uses

Fresh seed germinates readily and shows no dormancy [5] but should not be buried deeply [4]. Seed should be sown into a weed-free seedbed in early spring, or later with irrigation, or summer rainfall [6]. The seed is very small and is difficult to sow on its own, so is best sown blended with an inert carrier such as vermiculite [6]. Seed should be surface sown, not buried deeply [4, 6] and rubbed or rolled into the surface [6].

The plants are long-lived (5-25 years [4, 5]) and are very tolerant of low nutrient and dry sites, making *C. refractus* a suitable species to rehabilitate disturbed sites with rocky or skeletal substrates, such as eroded sites, quarries or mines [4]. It has reasonable fodder value and if provided grazing pressure is not too

high, it can survive for long periods of drought [4].

*C. refractus* provides valuable stock fodder on poor soils as long as it is not grazed continuously [6]. Despite its strongly aromatic nature it is often heavily grazed when young [1].

It is an attractive species, with striking seed heads and the crushed foliage has a pleasant lemony scent [4, 6]. It can be used as an alternative to *Themeda australis* in landscaping as the seedheads are equally distinctive and the plants are similar in size and form [6].

*C. refractus* becomes unpalatable and very flammable when mature [1] but resprouts after fire [5].

It is tolerant of *Phytophthora cinnamomi* [7].



To source seeds or plants:  
[www.grassywoodlands.org.au](http://www.grassywoodlands.org.au)

## References

(a) Pictures under licence from the Australian National Botanic Gardens.

[1] Cunningham, G.M., Mulham, W.E., Milthorpe, P.L. and Leigh, J.H. (1981). *Plants of Western New South Wales*. D. West: NSW Government Printing Office.

[2] Harden, G. (ed.) (1990-1993). *Flora of New South Wales*. Volume 4, pp. 444-445. Sydney, NSW: NSW University Press, Kensington.

[7] O'Neil, V. (1990). *Grow What Where*. Victoria: Penguin Books Australia Ltd.

## Internet links

[3] PlantNET National Herbarium of New South Wales: <http://plantnet.rbgsyd.nsw.gov.au/cgi-bin/NSWfl.pl?page=nswfl&lvl=p&name=Cymbopogon~refractus>

[4] Diversity Native Seeds: [http://diversitynative seeds.com.au/main/page\\_information\\_species\\_profiles\\_cymbopogon\\_refractus.html](http://diversitynative seeds.com.au/main/page_information_species_profiles_cymbopogon_refractus.html)

[5] Botanic Gardens Trust: [http://www.rbgsyd.nsw.gov.au/science/Evolutionary\\_Ecology\\_Research/Ecology\\_of\\_Cumberland\\_Plain\\_Woodland/woodland\\_plants/cymbopogon\\_refractus](http://www.rbgsyd.nsw.gov.au/science/Evolutionary_Ecology_Research/Ecology_of_Cumberland_Plain_Woodland/woodland_plants/cymbopogon_refractus)

[6] Native Seeds Pty. Ltd.: <http://www.nativeseeds.com.au/categories.asp?cID=113&c=205528>