

Some Grass Information

- A study led by WE Boyd of Southern Cross University in 1999 indicated that, contrary to public opinion, this Far North Coast area was not completely covered in forest when the white man arrived. Some areas of the subtropical rainforest known as the Big Scrub were treeless in pre European times. A fossil pollen record and one radiocarbon date reinforces this information for part of the Wilson River floodplain. *SCU website*
- Sub-tropical 'grasses' are very ancient ecosystems pre dating rainforest. In this area they were dominated by three grass species. On the lowlands Foxtail Grass (*Pennisetum alopecuroides*) was the dominant grass. On the ridges and higher country Blady Grass (*Imperata cylindrica*) and Kangaroo Grass (*Themeda triandra*) predominated. The grasses also supported many other grass and forb species. *Adapted from article Ralph Woodford*
- Grasses or *graminoids* are among the most versatile life forms. They became widespread towards the end of the Cretaceous period,

and fossilized dinosaur dung has been found containing a variety of grasses that include the ancestors of rice and bamboo. Grasses have adapted to conditions in lush rain forests, dry deserts, cold mountains and even intertidal habitats, and are now the most widespread plant type.

Wikipedia



Kangaroo Grass
Themeda australis

References for Grasses

Growing Native Plants on the North Coast of NSW, by Coffs Harbour Group, Australian Plant Society, NSW, Ltd., 2006 Descriptions of plants and information about propagation for some individual species as well as general information about plant management and propagation techniques.

Plants of the Forest Floor, compiled by Penny Watford and illustrated by Margaret Elliott, 2006. Very useful pen and ink illustrations and comes with a CD of photographs

Grasses of Subtropical Eastern Australia, illustrations and photographs by Margaret Elliott, 2008. A small book with pen and ink illustrations and a CD with photographs

Grasses of the North Coast of NSW, by Harry Rose, Carol Rose and Tac Campbell, 2006. Photographs of grasses and information, designed more for pasture, but could be useful for large gardens.

Mangroves to Mountains, revised edition, by Glenn Liepen, Jan Glazebrook, Denise Cox and Kerry Rathie, 2008, 2012 Beautiful photographs. Most plants also occur in northern NSW.

Grasses of New South Wales by S.W.L.Jacobs, R.D.B.Whalley and D.J.B. Wheeler, fourth edition, 2008, published by the University of New England. It is more technical, but includes all the grasses found in the Northern Rivers.

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Rainforest Grasses & Grass-like Plants in the Home Garden



Lomandra ssp.

Grass does occur within openings in the rainforest canopy both on floodplains and uplands. These areas, called 'grasses', are often very beautiful and support a variety of grass species and other plants. There is evidence that these grassy sites were kept clear by the Aborigines for hunting and other purposes. Many of the plants found in a 'grass' will grow well in a home garden.



Choose your plants carefully, situate in appropriate sites and, with moderate amount of care, you can have your own little bit of rainforest

Rainforest Grasses and Grass-like Plants for the Home Garden

***Alpinia caerulea* Native Ginger**

This has clumps of stems to 3m high, bearing glossy green leaves along the stems. The white flowers are borne in spikes at the end of the stem followed by blue berries, the flesh of which is edible.

***Alpinia arundelliana* Dwarf Native Ginger**

A similar plant to Native Ginger, but with smaller stems (to about 1 m) and with pink flowers. The berries are also blue.

Both species like slightly damp areas and prefer some shade, but once established can grow in full sun.

***Carex appressa* Tall Sedge**

A tufted plant to 120 cm high with bright green leaves which are lightly saw-toothed. The brown seed heads are born along stems amongst the leaves. Grows in shade or full sun, in damp places.

***Carex fascicularis* Tassel Sedge**

A densely tufted plant about 1m tall, with green leaves which have yellow-brown bases. The flowers and seed heads are long, drooping spikes borne along the stems – hence the common name. Prefers moist, shady areas.

***Crinum pedunculatum* Swamp Lily Beach Lily**

A tall, (1.5m), hardy plant with broad leaves. It produces a cluster of 10-40 scented, white, lily-like flowers on long stems. This plant grows well in gardens, but can be attacked by caterpillars in late summer. It copes well with being cut back. The large seeds germinate quite easily.

***Cymbopogon refractus* Barbed Wire Grass**

A tufted perennial, to about 1 m, with blue green leaves turning copper-coloured. When crushed the leaves have a lemon or gingery spicy scent. The seed heads are borne on long arching stems in clusters of pairs of short branches that bend backwards giving the appearance of barbed wire, hence the common name. The plant can grow in full sun on soils of lower fertility than Kangaroo Grass. However, again care must be taken not to cut it too low.

***Dianella caerulea* Blue Flax Lily, Blueberry Lily**

Perennial tufted or spreading plants, with long, slightly arching leaves. The pretty blue flowers are borne on branched stems usually carried above the leaves. The purple blue berries are edible. The plants can grow in full sun. There are other species of *Dianella* with different inflorescences which like different conditions.

***Isolepis nodosa* Knobby Club Rush**

A perennial plant with leaves reduced to orange-brown sheaths around the stems, which carry the dense globose seed- heads. It prefers sandy or very well drained soils, and spreads by rhizomes (underground stems)

***Juncus* species**

There are a number of species of *Juncus* which are all called rushes. While some prefer shade, many can grow well in full sun and dry conditions. The leaves are reduced to sheaths at the base of the stems, which bear the branching inflorescences with many small brown flowers apparently at the side of the stem.



Alpinia caerulea Native Ginger

***Lomandra* species Mat Rushes**

Various species of *Lomandra* are widely used in landscaping as they grow well in most situations and perform a useful service in stabilising creek banks and other soil embankments. They are tufted plants, with separate male and female plants, which have different flowering spikes bearing small yellow to white or cream flowers, developing the fruits which are brown, yellow or orange. The different species can be distinguished by the shape of the leaf tips.

***Microlaena stipoides* Weeping Grass**

A short tufted perennial to 60cm high, with soft green leaves and long arching stems bearing the green seed heads. It prefers sheltered and shady areas, and responds to fertiliser.

***Themeda australis*, Kangaroo Grass**

A tufted perennial, forming clumps 40 – 100cm high and wide, with fine soft green leaves, fading to straw coloured. The seed-head bearing stems are longer than the leaves. The seed heads are gold to copper coloured with long dark awns, forming in spring to autumn. Does not respond well to fertiliser, but can be pruned after flowering to tidy the plant. Do not cut too short to avoid removing the growing points. Can grow in full sun.