

Cenchrus clandestinus

COMMON NAME

Kikuyu grass

SYNONYMS

Pennisetum clandestinum Chiov.

FAMILY

Poaceae

AUTHORITY

Cenchrus clandestinus (Hochst. ex Chiov.) Morrone

FLORA CATEGORY

Vascular – Exotic

STRUCTURAL CLASS

Grasses

CONSERVATION STATUS

Not applicable

HABITAT

Terrestrial. A coastal plant of high fertile sites (Timmins & MacKenzie 1995). A plant that prefers warm, moist and fertile soils, but is drought resistant (Department of Conservation 1996). A plant of sand dunes (Timmins & MacKenzie 1995). A plant that is a common dominant pasture grass (Department of Conservation 1996). A plant that is invasive in coastal areas (Department of Conservation 1996).

WETLAND PLANT INDICATOR STATUS RATING

FACU: Facultative Upland

Occasionally is a hydrophyte but usually occurs in uplands (non-wetlands).

FEATURES

Creeping, perennial, hairy, mat-forming grass. Stolons very long, climbing supported occ to 2+ m, rooting frequently. Rhizomes long. Leaves alternate, 5-40 x 3-9 cm, bright green to yellow-green, soft and drooping, sparsely hairy above and below, blades folded, ligule a fringe of hairs, auricle missing. Sheath pale green to white, with soft 2-4 mm hairs. Seedhead of 2-3 tiny spikelets in upper leaf sheaths, wispy anthers and stigmas

SIMILAR TAXA

The creeping aggressive growth form is familiar to most people especially in Northern areas. It is most similar to *Stenotaphrum secundatum* (buffalo grass) but lacks the distinctive seed heads of this species. In fact the flowers of kikuyu are small and cryptic so are rarely seen.

FLOWERING

flowers are very small and reduced.

FLOWER COLOURS

Red/Pink, White



Cenchrus clandestinus, leafy shoot.
Photographer: John Smith-Dodsworth



Cenchrus clandestinus, stigmas. Photographer: John Smith-Dodsworth

LIFE CYCLE

Perennial. The plant reproduces vegetatively through the resprouting of rhizomatous fragments (Timmins & MacKenzie 1995; Department of Conservation 1996).

Plant produces seed in NZ (Department of Conservation 1996).

Seed is wind dispersed (Timmins & MacKenzie 1995). Dispersal is aided by grazing animals (seed?) (Department of Conservation 1996).

YEAR NATURALISED

1936

ORIGIN

trop & S Africa, E. Africa, N. Africa, Kenya.

REASON FOR INTRODUCTION

Agricultural

TOLERANCES

The plant that is very tolerant of drought, slightly tolerant of frost and tolerant of poor drainage (Timmins & MacKenzie 1995). Physical damage and grazing result in resprouting from underground rhizomes (Timmins & MacKenzie 1995). Requires high soil fertility (Atkinson 1997).

ETYMOLOGY

cenchrus: From the Greek cenchros which means millet

REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

Esler, A.E. 1998. The clandestine flowering of Kikuyu grass. Auckland Botanical Society Journal, 53: 62-64.

Little, C. 1999. Kikuyu a further note. Auckland Botanical Society Journal, 54: 13

MORE INFORMATION

<https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/cenchrus-clandestinus/>