

# Paspalum distichum

## COMMON NAMES

Mercer grass

## SYNONYMS

*Paspalum paspalodes*

## FAMILY

Poaceae

## AUTHORITY

*Paspalum distichum* L.

## FLORA CATEGORY

Vascular – Exotic

## STRUCTURAL CLASS

Grasses

## NVS CODE

PASDIS

## CONSERVATION STATUS

Not applicable

## SIMPLIFIED DESCRIPTION

Floating grass forming dense mats, with typical two-pronged lowerheads produced in summer.

## DISTRIBUTION

Locally common in the North Island but also in the South Island as far south as Canterbury.

## HABITAT

Still and slow flowing water bodies and wetland margins.

## WETLAND PLANT INDICATOR STATUS RATING

FACW: Facultative Wetland

Usually is a hydrophyte but occasionally found in uplands (non-wetlands).

## DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Creeping, perennial, mat-forming grass, the stems sprawl along the ground and then grow to 60 cm tall. **Stolons** long, rooting frequently, with rhizomes. **Leaves** are distantly alternate, the lamina is 4-10 cm long and 2-6mm wide, tip pointed, bluish-green, soft and lax, slightly hairy above and below, rolled and hairy at base. **Ligule** up to 4 mm, membrane-like, whitish-translucent, often torn. **Auricle** absent. **Sheath** with reddish-purple tinge. **Seedhead** of 2 (sometimes 1 or 3) diverging, erect racemes, 25–50 mm long; with softly hairy spikelets.

## SIMILAR TAXA

Kikuyu grass (*Cenchrus clandestinus*). Differs from Mercer grass in that Kikuyu grass lacks a membranous ligule and has a short flowering head that is almost enclosed within the leaves. In contrast, Mercer grass has a very distinctive forked flowering head.

## FLOWERING

November, December, January, February

## FLOWER COLOURS

Green



*Paspalum distichum*. Photographer: John Smith-Dodsworth, Licence: CC BY-NC.



Whenuakura River mouth; ligule, sheath, culm, leaf base. Photographer: Colin C. Ogle, Date taken: 05/04/2014, Licence: CC BY-NC.

## FRUITING

Late summer

## LIFE CYCLE

Perennial. Reproduces by seed and stem fragmentation. Seeds freely, seed viability unknown. Dispersed by water, livestock pelts and hooves (possibly seed in dung). Contaminated diggers and dumped vegetation.

## YEAR NATURALISED

1887

## ORIGIN

Europe

## REASON FOR INTRODUCTION

Forage grass for wet areas

## CONTROL TECHNIQUES

Not usually controlled in New Zealand, but may be controlled by mowing or herbicidally.

## TOLERANCES

Tolerates wet, hot to mod-cool, wind, damage and grazing, most soils. Intolerant of frost, deep shade and dry conditions.

## ETYMOLOGY

**paspalum**: The Greek name for millet

## ENVIRONMENTAL WEED (2024)

**This plant is named in a list of 386 environmental weeds in New Zealand 2024 prepared by DOC.** 759 candidate species were considered for inclusion on this new comprehensive list of environmental weeds in New Zealand. The species considered were drawn from published lists of weed species, lists of plants that must be reported or managed by law if observed, existing national and regional programmes and agreements for pest management, and species already managed by the Department of Conservation (DOC). Candidate species were then assessed to see if they were fully naturalised and whether they have more than minor impacts in natural ecosystems. Read the full report [here](#).

## ATTRIBUTION

Factsheet prepared by Paul Champion and Deborah Hofstra (NIWA).

## REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

Champion P. et al. 2020. Freshwater Invasive Species of New Zealand 2020. NIWA publication.  
<https://docs.niwa.co.nz/library/public/FreInSpec.pdf>

## MORE INFORMATION

<https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/paspalum-distichum/>

## PDF DATE

17 September 2024