

Fact Sheet

Serrated tussock (*Nassella trichotoma*)

The problem

Serrated tussock is a potentially devastating weed, which has aggressively invaded Victoria. As an impostor that resembles native tussock grasses, serrated tussock often goes unnoticed until it has taken root and rapidly invaded large areas of pasture. Recent trials have shown that a heavy infestation of the weed can lead to a production loss of up to 95 per cent.

Serrated tussock is considered one of the state's most costly and threatening weeds, causing serious damage to environmental and agricultural assets.

Livestock forced to graze on serrated tussock can starve to death, despite a full stomach, due to its low nutritional content.

Serrated tussock threatens the biodiversity values of native grasslands and poses a fire hazard in urban areas.

The weed

Serrated tussock is a long-living perennial grass. Tussocks are typically about 50cm high.

Serrated tussock usually flowers and sets seed from October to January, with peak flowering time in November and December. Fully ripe and viable seeds can germinate at any time after rain and in response to soil disturbance, with the largest germination occurring in spring.

Serrated tussock grows in a variety of climates with annual rainfall of 450–1000 mm. It is not limited by soil type or fertility and can tolerate freezing temperatures.

If not controlled, a small infestation of serrated tussock can rapidly turn into a large problem, becoming a moderately dense infestation after five years and a heavy infestation within eight.

How it spreads

Serrated tussock is spread solely by seed. Mature plants can produce more than 140,000 seeds a year.

Its extremely light seed heads can be blown over long distances. Water, machinery, vehicles and stock can easily transport seeds. Seeds can remain viable in the digestive tract of grazing animals for up to 10 days.

Where it grows

Serrated tussock currently infests 82,000 hectares of Victoria, but its potential spread has been predicted to be 4.6 million hectares based on climatic models. It is most prevalent on agricultural land surrounding Melbourne, Geelong and Bacchus Marsh.

It is commonly found in pasture, along roadsides and in dry coastal vegetation.

Identifying serrated tussock

Early identification and removal of serrated tussock is the best way to protect your land. Learn to identify it, regularly check for it and act promptly to remove it.



In Brief

- Dense infestations can reduce the productivity of grazing land by 95 per cent.
- Established serrated tussock is extremely expensive to control.
- Identifying and acting quickly to remove new infestations of serrated tussock is the best form of control.
- Destroying and replacing serrated tussock with dense competitive vegetation is essential for long-term management.

Weeds are everyone's property



A simple way to distinguish serrated tussock from other species is to roll the leaves between the thumb and forefinger. Serrated tussock leaves roll smoothly as if cylindrical. Native species feel like they have flat edges.

Also, young serrated tussock plants are bright green at the base in autumn and easy to distinguish from native species that have dried off and are straw colour.

Preventing the spread

Only buy livestock from areas free of serrated tussock. Any animals that have grazed in infested pastures should be quarantined for 10 days before releasing them into clean pastures.

Only buy certified seed and ensure that machinery, hay and other fodder are uncontaminated.

Planting shelter belts of rows of trees and shrubs along property boundaries can also limit the dispersal of seeds.

Check paddocks for serrated tussock regularly and act quickly to remove any plants that you find, chipping them out or spot spraying with an appropriate herbicide.

Integrated management

Serrated tussock management needs to be an integral component of environmental or agricultural resource management.

Long-term serrated tussock control is best achieved through the combined use of a number of control techniques as part of a landowner's ongoing land management program.

Long-term control cannot be achieved by the use of herbicide alone. Serrated tussock must be destroyed and replaced with strong competitive vegetation, such as improved pasture or native vegetation, to prevent further germination of new plants from the seed bank.

Responsibility for control

Serrated tussock is a Regionally Prohibited Weed in the Mallee, North Central, Corangamite, Goulburn Broken, North East and East Gippsland catchments. Landowners in these areas must take all reasonable steps to eradicate it.

In the Glenelg-Hopkins, Port Phillip and Westernport and West Gippsland catchments, serrated tussock is a Regionally Controlled Weed. Landowners in these areas must take all reasonable steps to prevent its growth and spread.



For further information about managing serrated tussock refer to the Landcare notes available on www.dpi.vic.gov.au/notes or contact the Customer Service Centre on 136 186.

Tackling Weeds on Private Land is a \$9 million, three-year State Government initiative to encourage landowners to work collaboratively to manage weeds.

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