



Lawns of Australian Grasses

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From the August 2005 issue of the Study Group Newsletter.

As increasingly greater areas of our suburbs become covered with hard surfaces - concrete, paving, brick, timber - lawns (as well as gardens) are shrinking fast. I think most of us have mixed feelings about lawns, with happy childhood memories of playing on grass and current concerns about water-demanding lawns of exotic grasses. We have no lawn in our garden, though we do have a number of tufted grasses. Our nature strip has been replaced by a combination of daisies with just a few clumps of Kangaroo Grass and a couple of poas. Even so, in a small garden, a little lawn can be an attractive feature in itself, as a simple green open space contrasting with garden beds.

A lawn of Australian grasses would look attractive and be ecologically beneficial, providing habitat for insects and birds. It would also require much less water and very little mowing. I have often wondered myself, and also been asked by others, about the possibility of establishing such a lawn. I have seen this done very successfully by the diligent removal of all weeds from an area already growing some indigenous grasses. However most people who want to create a lawn are starting with bare soil and not a native grass seed in sight.

Creation of an Australian lawn should now be possible. Recently I heard of a company Native Seeds Pty Ltd based in Cheltenham, Victoria, which sells seeds of Australian grasses. They have 21 lines of grass seeds available, of various species or combinations of species suitable for different purposes or conditions. The four most commonly used grasses are Weeping Grass (*Microlaena stipoides*), various Wallaby Grasses (formerly *Danthonia* species, now divided into different genera), Kangaroo Grass (*Themeda triandra*) and Red Grass (or Red-leg Grass) (*Bothriochloa macra*). Each grass has its own properties - both advantages and disadvantages - and by using a mixture the results can be optimised. I had not heard of Red Grass before but it occurs widely in Victoria and also in New South Wales, Queensland, South Australia and Tasmania, and sounds an attractive and useful grass.

So far this company has provided seeds for Councils, commercial projects and regeneration work, but they hope to become more widely used by the general gardening public. With water restrictions becoming more common, I expect they may soon be very busy. I wish them good luck and hope this may signal the beginning of a new phase of lawn-growing in Australia. For details of the grass seeds available and for a lot more information, you can see [their website](#).