

# Terminating the tussock



**SERRATED TUSSOCK** (*Nassella ichotoma*) is a perennial, drought-resistant, highly invasive tussock-forming grass native to South America.

It has adapted to a range of Australian environments, seeds prolifically and is difficult and costly to control, with large volumes of seed spread long distances by wind.

Serrated tussock was first introduced to Australia as early as 1900 and was first identified in NSW in 1935 from plants collected near the Yass River.

Today the main infestations in NSW are in the Central and Southern Tablelands and small areas on the Northern Tablelands.

Serrated tussock requires relatively cool conditions for growth and survival; hot summers have tended to restrict spread westward and to the north.

The plant is also capable of surviving droughts.

The weed can infest highly arable agricultural land and steep and non-arable areas with low fertility and will colonise both native and introduced pastures.

Serrated tussock is not palatable for livestock and has little feed value.

The seeds are also a serious contaminant of hay and grain, while farm machinery such as slashers, vehicles and tractors can transport seed to clean areas.

Serrated tussock threatens the biodiversity of many native vegetation communities, including native grasslands, grassy woodlands, sclerophyll forests and some coastal vegetation.

Similar in appearance to many Australian native grass species, serrated tussock is difficult to identify when not in flower and can go unnoticed for years, seriously affecting the native fauna and flora.

Mature tussocks can grow to 45 centimetres tall and have a diameter at the base of 25cm.

It changes colour throughout the year and is most recognisable when in full flower in late spring/summer, when it has a distinct purple tinge.

After flowering in late summer, fully developed seed heads are golden brown above a light green tussock base. In late autumn and winter, frosting bleaches the tussocks a golden yellow. In early to mid spring the tussocks are light green with brown tips.

Serrated tussock leaves are tightly rolled, narrow, stiff and upright.

They have small serrations that can be felt when the leaf is drawn between the fingers.

Reliance on serrations alone for identification can be misleading as other tussock grasses have similar serrations.

The ligule is the key feature for identifying serrated tussock. To find it, trace down a leaf to its junction with the next leaf. Slowly separate and bend the leaf back, and a small, white hairless flap about one millimetre long will

protrude vertically. The leaf bases of serrated tussock are whitish and shallot-like.

The seed head is a panicle (multi-branched seed head) up to 35cm long with a weeping appearance when in full flower. At each junction of the seed head, there are two or three branches with a single seed on each branch, or alternatively another set of small branches with single seeds.

Seeds of serrated tussock are hard and small (1.5 millimetres long), with a ring of white hairs at one end and a twisted awn 25mm long at the other. The awn is attached off-centre to the seed. At flowering the seed is encased in reddish-brown or purple bracts.

Serrated tussock has a deep, fibrous root system that makes pulling plants from the ground more difficult compared to other tussock grasses of similar size.

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