



AGROPYRON SCABRUM

Common Wheatgrass

A more or less tufted perennial, of varying height and stature, sometimes less than 30 cm tall with erect, fine leaves, or up to 1 m tall with narrow, spreading, flat or inrolled leaves, often bluish-green in colour. *Culms* erect, drooping in taller specimens, smooth or sometimes rough. *Nodes* without hairs, the internodes longer than the leaf sheaths. *Leaves* basal and on the culms. *Leaf sheaths* tight, becoming loose below and persisting as a fibrous mass at the base, with or without hairs, smooth, striate. *Ligule* reduced to a short, membranous rim. *Leaf blades* narrow, flat or inrolled, tapering gradually to a fine point, 2–4 mm wide, up to 40 cm long, rough along the margins.

Inflorescence an elongated, loose spike, 15–20 cm long, the 2–12 spikelets borne singly, alternately and distinctly separate along either side of the axis. *Spikelets* (S) 2.5–3.5 cm long (excluding the awns), at maturity disarticulating and falling free from the persistent glumes, somewhat laterally flattened, very rough downwardly to the touch. *Florets* 1–20, in depauperate specimens 1 or 2, others usually 6–8, all alike, except the upper floret, which is usually small; all bisexual. *Glumes* (G_1 , G_2) shorter than the spikelet, slightly unequal, abruptly pointed at the tip, firm, noticeably striate, becoming straw-coloured at maturity; the lower glume (G_1) shorter than the upper, 8–10 mm long, 3–5-nerved, the nerves prominent; the upper (G_2) about 12 mm long, slightly broader than the lower, 5–7-nerved. *Lemmas* (L) about the length of G_2 , faintly 5-nerved, the tip produced into a long, straight awn up to 3–4 cm, which is very rough due to upward-pointing barbs, slightly keeled and rough down the back in the upper part. *Paleas* (P) slightly shorter than the lemmas, rounded at the tip, 2-nerved, strongly 2-keeled along the nerves near the margin, the back markedly concave between the keels, which are rough and lined with spines. *Anthers* 3, 2.5 mm long.

This is a grass of temperate and subtropical Australia. In southeast Queensland, it occurs in the southern area, but is locally abundant on the Darling Downs and border highlands. Although not particularly vigorous as a forage species, it is readily eaten and usually not seen in grazed areas. The species is very variable in form and size. Vickery (1950b) has distinguished a variety of the species (*A. scabrum* var. *plurinerve*) from the Darling Downs. It differs from *A. scabrum* in having longer glumes (10–15 mm), which are 6–8-nerved.

REFERENCES

Bailey (1902),¹ p. 1920; Vickery (1950b),² p. 342; Gardner (1952)³ p. 195; Burbidge & Gray (1970),⁴ p. 48; Willis (1970),⁵ pp. 116–18; Beadle *et al.* (1972),⁶ p. 640; Black (1978),⁷ p. 139.

KEY TO SPECIES

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| Lemmas up to 10 mm long, with awns up to 5 mm (comb wheatgrass) | <i>A. pectinatum</i> ⁵ |
| Lemmas up to 20 mm long, with awns up to 40 mm (common wheatgrass) | <i>A. scabrum</i> ^{1,2,3,4,6,7} |