



LEPTOCHLOA DIGITATA

Umbrella Canegrass

A stiff, erect perennial, up to 2 m tall, bluish-green in colour. *Culms* cane-like, arising from an almost bulbous and scaly root stock, smooth and hairless, with many prominent nodes, which may be branched. *Nodes* without hairs. *Leaves* mainly on the culms. *Leaf sheaths* loose, not enclosing the culm, smooth, striate. *Ligule* reduced to a narrow, membranous rim. *Leaf blades* short, flat, up to 6 mm broad, tapering to a point, often dropping from the ligule at maturity.

Inflorescence composed of 6–20 racemes arranged in a series of closely packed whorls, but appearing digitate, green when young, becoming straw-coloured at maturity. *Spikelets* (S) all similar, 3–4 mm long, almost sessile and densely crowded in 2 rows along one side of the raceme axis. *Florets* 3–7, similar, all bisexual or the terminal one sterile, falling free from the persistent glumes. *Glumes* (G₁, G₂) unequal, membranous, 1-nerved; the lower glume (G₁) 1.5 mm long; the upper (G₂) 2 mm long. *Lemmas* (L) 2 mm long, membranous, 3-nerved, slightly keeled. *Paleas* (P) slightly shorter, 2-nerved and 2-keeled, membranous. *Anthers* 3, 0.3 mm long.

The grass is fairly common in Queensland in river-beds and moist spots, particularly in the inland areas. With its paucity of rather short leaves, it is unlikely to be of much importance as a forage grass. The inflorescence often appears very similar to *Chloris gayana* (Rhodes grass) at first sight, but the vegetative parts are quite different. The other species of *Leptochloa* are strikingly different, as may be seen from the illustration of *L. ciliolata* (opposite), but are difficult to distinguish from each other.

REFERENCES

Bailey (1902),¹ p. 1899 (as *L. subdigitata*); Gardner (1952),² p. 211; Lazarides (1970),³ p. 91; Blake (1972b),⁴ pp. 5-19; Lazarides (1980a);⁵ Jessop (1981),⁶ p. 462.

KEY TO SPECIES

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| 1. Robust wiry or cane-like grass, up to 2 m tall. Inflorescence digitate or subdigitate (umbrella cane grass)
Plants less than 1 m tall, not wiry or cane-like. Inflorescence racemose, with an extended axis. | <i>L. digitata</i> ^{1,2,3,4,5,6}
2 |
| 2. Annual; glumes as long as spikelet or almost so (red sprangletop)
Perennial; glumes much shorter than spikelet. Coastal. | <i>L. filiformis</i> ^{4,5}
3 |
| 3. Panicle open, with racemes stiffly spreading; spikelets well separated along raceme, only overlapping towards tip.
Panicle contracted or open, racemes not stiff; spikelets usually overlapping along most of raceme. | <i>L. divaricatissima</i> ^{4,5}
4 |
| 4. Ligules of upper leaves 4–5 mm long. Rare.
Ligules of upper leaves less than 2 mm long. | <i>L. ligulata</i> ⁵
5 |
| 5. Spikelets usually 5–6 mm long and 4–6 flowered; racemes bearing spikelets almost to base (slender canegrass)
Spikelets usually 2.5–3.5 mm long and 3–4 flowered; racemes usually naked in lower part. | <i>L. decipiens</i> ^{4,5}
(incl. <i>peacockii</i>)
<i>L. ciliolata</i> ^{4,5}
(<i>debilis</i>) |