



SCHIZACHYRIUM FRAGILE

Fire Grass or Red Spathe Grass

A tufted annual, 10–75 cm tall. *Culms* very slender, mostly unbranched, smooth, hairless, often purplish and several-noded. *Leaves* both basal and on the culms. *Leaf sheaths* somewhat compressed, keeled, narrow, tight around the culms, smooth, hairless, finely striate, often becoming reddish when old. *Ligule* very short, truncate, with dense, short hairs at the apex. *Leaf blades* flat or folded, thin, up to 10 cm long, 1–2 mm wide, pointed from near the tip, hairless, very lightly rough on the upper surface and margins.

Inflorescence a single raceme, at first entirely enclosed by a sheathing spathe 4–6 cm long, but slowly exerting from it with maturity, the raceme on a slender stalk arising from the axil of a leaf, the joints and pedicels compressed and concave, bearded with long, white hairs along one and the upper part of the other margin, breaking up readily at maturity into the joints. *Spikelets* (S_1 , S_2) closely adpressed in pairs along the raceme, one sessile and bisexual, the other shortly pedicellate, sterile and reduced to a single glume. *Florets* 2 in the sessile spikelet, the lower floret neuter and reduced to a lemma, the upper bisexual; none in the pedicellate spikelet. *Sessile spikelet* (S_1) 6–7 mm long, the callus bearded with white hairs. *Glumes* (G_1 , G_2) unequal; the lower glume (G_1) the length of the spikelet, shortly hairy on the back in the lower half and margins, 3-nerved, papery, the tip with 2 short teeth, narrowly winged on the keels in the upper part; the upper (G_2) slightly shorter, sharply pointed, hairless, 1-nerved, papery-membranous, narrowly winged on the keels. *Lemma* (L_1) of the lower sterile floret about $\frac{3}{4}$ the length of the glumes, membranous, nerveless. *Palea* absent. *Lemma* (L_2) of the upper fertile floret slightly shorter, cleft almost to its base into 2 membranous lobes with a twisted and kneed awn 1 cm long arising from the sinus, the twisted column of which is about $\frac{1}{2}$ its length. *Palea* absent. *Anthers* 3, 1 mm long. *Pedicellate spikelet* (S_2) reduced to a narrow, pointed lower glume (G_1), 1–2 mm long, the tip produced into a bristle 3–4 mm long.

The grass is widespread in southern Queensland, though not usually common. However, occasionally it may be locally abundant, particularly in northern areas. It is eaten by stock, though obviously is of little consequence as a forage grass due to its rapid flowering, sparseness of herbage and ephemeral nature.

REFERENCES

Bailey (1902),¹ p. 1866 (as *Andropogon fragilis*); Gardner (1952),² pp. 333–37; Vickery (1961),³ p. 49 (as *S. obliqueberbe*); Blake (1969a),⁴ p. 80; Lazarides (1970),⁵ p. 220; Blake (1974),⁶ pp. 2–29 (Key to Australian species); Jessop (1981),⁷ p. 490.

KEY TO SPECIES

1. Lower glume of sessile spikelet without wings or extended margins in upper part; hairs at callus insignificant, usually less than 1 mm long. Eastern. *S. pseudeulalia*^{4,6,7}
Lower glume of sessile spikelet with more or less well-developed wings in upper part, these sometimes reduced to a narrow membranous margin; hairs at callus prominent, usually exceeding 2 mm long. 2
2. Rhachis joints with a dense, oblique band of stiff hairs on back, increasing in length up joint. Widespread (fire grass or red spathe grass) *S. fragile*^{1,2,3,4,5,6,7}
(*obliquiberbe*) 3
Rhachis joint more or less diffusely hairy in lower part, or hairless, but without a dense, oblique band of hairs.
3. Spikelets 3.5–4.5 mm long. North-western. *S. perplexum*⁶
Spikelets 5–8 mm long. Eastern. *S. pachyarthron*^{2,6}