

Sabi Grass

(Urochloa mosambicensis)

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DESCRIPTION

Sabi grass (*Urochloa mosambicensis*) is a perennial with a variable plant habit. It may have stolons or short rhizomes.

Stems are smooth, erect and up to 100 cm tall and often branch at the nodes. Flowering spikes are up to 15 cm long. The leaves are often in clusters and are hairy on both the upper and lower surfaces. They are 15 cm long and 15 mm wide.

One suitable cultivar called Nixon was released in the Northern Territory (NT). It differs from the general description of sabi grass as described above in that it has short rhizomes and erect stems reaching up to 80 cm in length and its leaves are pale to bright green, 10 to 15 mm wide and 10 to 20 cm long, tapering to a point. In a dense stand, the leaves are usually erect, while in sparse stands they are mostly semi-erect. Flowering spikes are 2 to 6 cm long. Nixon commences flowering three to four weeks after the first rains of the wet season and continues to produce inflorescences until soil moisture is exhausted in the dry season. Seeds are a light buff or cream in colour and number about a million per kilogram.

In Queensland, the seeds of a 'common' strain are harvested and sold. This strain may have the same origin as Nixon.

A new cultivar called Saraji, which was developed as a ground cover for mining revegetation in Central Queensland, performed poorly at Berrimah Farm, near Darwin. It may perform better in drier areas.

CLIMATE AND SOILS

A native of southern and eastern Africa, sabi grass is suitable for monsoonal areas which have an annual rainfall of 500 to 1200 mm. It has become naturalised in the NT, particularly around Katherine and in the Douglas/Daly area, as well as in Queensland.

It will grow on a wide range of soil types, from clay loams to sandy soils, including Tippera and Blain soils.

Sabi grass is fairly drought-resistant but will not tolerate flooding or prolonged water-logging.

Nixon responds well to light unseasonal rainfall and early wet season storms.



Figure 1. Nixon seedhead

SOWING

Establishment is relatively easy because a thin stand will thicken up over time from seed set by existing plants.

For best results, seed should be sown onto a well-prepared seedbed at the rate of 1 to 4 kg/ha.

Freshly-harvested seed will not germinate because of seed dormancy, but it can be used six to 12 months after harvest.

MANAGEMENT

Fertiliser Requirements

Sabi grass responds well to increased amounts of phosphorus and nitrogen in the soil.

Seeds should be sown with 50 to 150 kg/ha of superphosphate, depending on soil type and rainfall. Maintenance dressings of 25 to 50 kg/ha of superphosphate should be applied annually.

Nitrogen should be supplied to the pasture by planting a legume with sabi grass.

Yield

Dry matter production from sabi grass of 4 to 6 t/ha has been achieved from grazed and un-grazed swards where no nitrogen fertiliser was applied. Sabi grass yields reached 10 to 12 t/ha following nitrogen application at the rate of 100 to 200 kg /ha. Up to three crops of sabi seed of 50 kg/ha or more can be produced at six-weekly intervals during the wet season.

Grazing

Sabi grass is very palatable and can withstand close grazing. It hays off rapidly as the soil dries out and forage quality declines rapidly in the dry season. However, it often continues to produce some green material during the dry season.

Mixtures

Amiga, Verano, Wynn, Seca, Siran and Cavalcade legumes may be included in mixtures with sabi grass.

Note: Sabi grass tolerates burning.

PESTS AND DISEASES

There is no evidence of pests or diseases that affect sabi grass production in the NT.

WARNING

Pasture plants have the potential to become weeds in certain situations. To prevent that, ensure that pasture seeds and/or vegetative materials are not inadvertently transferred to adjacent properties or road sides.

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