

Indian Bluegrass

(Bothriochloa pertusa)

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DESCRIPTION

Indian bluegrass (*Bothriochloa pertusa*) is a moderately yielding, low-growing, perennial grass. It produces many stolons (runners) which root readily at the nodes.

The leaves are fine and the foliage grows to 30 cm but the erect flowering stems stand up to 50 cm. Crushed leaves and stems have a characteristic scent.

Seeds are small, light, have a pit in the hull and are hairy, giving seed samples a "fluffy" appearance.

There are a number of strains which are naturalised in various areas of Central Queensland. The two strains recommended for sowing in the NT are Bowen which is early flowering (January) and forms a loose sward and Yeppoon which flowers in May and forms a vigorous, dense sward.



CLIMATE AND SOILS

Indian bluegrass is a native of the old world tropics and is widely distributed from East Africa to Indonesia. It occurs in dry areas with annual rainfall ranging from 500 to 900 mm.

In the NT it is recommended for areas receiving 500 mm and over of annual rainfall.

A "local" form, similar in appearance to the Bowen strain is found on nature strips and foreshore areas around Darwin, and on nature strips and lawn areas in Katherine.

In Central Queensland it tends to invade areas where native tussock grasses have been weakened by grazing, mowing, cultivation or traffic.

It is adapted to a wide range of soil types but appears to prefer soils with a high clay content (Tippera, Tindal in the NT). In higher rainfall areas it is only suited to well drained soils.

Indian blue grass is drought resistant, but severe dry periods can thin out a stand to the better rooted tussocks. After the dry period, regrowth from remaining tussocks and many new seedlings rapidly reforms a sward.

SOWING

Indian bluegrass has the capacity to establish with minimal cultivation. A sparse stand will thicken up rapidly.

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

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



MANAGEMENT

Fertiliser requirements: Indian bluegrass has low fertiliser requirements, and will grow on low fertility and eroded soils.

Seed should be sown with 50-100 kg/ha superphosphate, depending on soil type and rainfall. Maintenance dressings of 25-50 kg/ha superphosphate should be applied yearly.

Indian bluegrass will respond to nitrogen fertiliser, but nitrogen should be supplied to the pasture by sowing a legume with the Indian bluegrass.

Yield: Dry matter yields have not been recorded in the NT but 2 to 4 tonnes per hectare would be expected without applied fertiliser. A seed yield of 70 kg per hectare has been recorded.

Grazing: Once established, Indian bluegrass can withstand heavy grazing or close frequent mowing. Its persistence and spread is enhanced by continuous heavy grazing or by frequent cutting.

It is a grass of moderate yield and quality which will not give the same animal production as more vigorous and better quality grasses such as buffel, signal, sabi, pangola or finger grasses.

Hayed off material retains its quality and is eaten during the dry season.

Mixtures: Legumes which could be sown in mixtures with Indian bluegrass are Verano, Wynn, Amiga and Cavalcade.

Haymaking: The yield is low but bluegrass hay is well eaten by cattle and horses.

Other: Severe fire can thin a stand, but recovery from tussocks and seedlings can be rapid. It does not grow well when shaded by taller pasture plants or weeds.

Indian bluegrass is suitable for soil conservation purposes and heavily grazed areas such as holding paddocks and laneways.

Pests and diseases: There are no records of pests or diseases affecting 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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