

“Paying attention is a form of reciprocity
with the living world, receiving the gifts
with open eyes and open heart.”

– Robin Wall Kimmerer



Goldfields
Libraries

www.castlemaineseedlibrary.org.au

Cover image - Eliza-Jane Gilchrist

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information that is correct and relevant at the time of
publication.



Themeda triandra
Kangaroo Grass

The Indigenous Seed Project acknowledges the local Dja Dja Wurrung people as the first inhabitants of the land we live upon. We recognise their continuing connection to this land, rivers and creeks and to their rich ancient culture.

We acknowledge that at the time of European arrival the totality of the lands that are now known as Victoria were occupied by sovereign Indigenous nations who owned, cared for and enjoyed their land in accordance with their laws, customs and traditions.

We acknowledge, with full respect, the strength and power of all Traditional Owners, Elder, Ancestors, and young leaders who fight to protect and look after Country, Community, Language and Lore in the face of ongoing colonial interruptions and cultural genocide.

To Learn more please visit djadjawurrung.com.au

The Indigenous Seed Project supports a Treaty for Victoria.

Acknowledgments

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I would also like to thank Eliza-Jane Gilchrist for her constant support and help during the creation of this project - having a right-hand woman like Eliza was invaluable.

Thanks to the lovely group of volunteers who assisted in picking Chocolate Lily seed. Big thanks to The Castlemaine Seed Library Working Group; Dayna, Annelise and Susan - the collective capacity you women have is incredible. The Castlemaine Library for supporting, assisting with logistics and offering a space to accommodate the project in its completed state. Thanks to our regular Seed Library volunteers who helped package and label the seeds. This event/project is supported by the Mount Alexander Shire Council's Events/Community Grants Program.

Jo Matthews, Indigenous Seed Project coordinator

Terminology

Indigenous

Refers to a plant species that occurs naturally in a region but not exclusively. For example, River Red Gum (*Eucalyptus camaldulensis*) is indigenous to our shire but it is also indigenous to many other parts of Australia.

Endemic

Refers to a plant species that grows only in a specific designated area. In Mount Alexander Shire we only have one plant species that is endemic - the Southern Shepherd's Purse (*Ballantinia antipoda*), a highly threatened species that occurs only on Mt. Alexander. It is also correct to say that Southern Shepherd's Purse is indigenous to Victoria, or indigenous to Australia, or indigenous to Shire of Mount Alexander.

River Red Gum, which occurs naturally in every state and territory of Australia except for Tasmania, is endemic to Australia, meaning it does not occur naturally in any other country.

Provenance

Refers to the area that the seed was originally collected from. Across Mount Alexander Shire conditions for plants vary from place to place with changes in soil type, altitude, aspect, annual rainfall, frost severity, etc. so where the seed is sourced from influences how well the plants grown from that seed will thrive when they are planted out. For example the summit of Mt Alexander is 430m higher than Castlemaine, receives 2 inches more rain annually, and is granitic in geology whereas Castlemaine is sedimentary so plants grown from seed collected on the mountain would not do so well in Castlemaine and vice versa.

Hello and thank-you for taking some Indigenous seeds to germinate!

The Indigenous Seed Project emerged from the desire to raise awareness of the local flora in Leanganook (Mt Alexander).

The project will create the opportunity for anyone to experience propagating indigenous seeds and to also learn about the ecological and cultural significance of the plant they are growing. The accompanying booklets will also provide valuable information about how to use the plant in a garden context and information on growing conditions for each plant. With only 15% of the local Box Iron Bark forests remaining, it's more important than ever that we get to know these plants and include them in our gardens. This will help extend habitats for the local fauna and make your garden more resilient to future climate changes by using plants that have adapted to local conditions.

I hope you will sit with this little book, read its content and create a connection to the plant/s you have chosen to grow. Perhaps next time you are in the bush you will be able to recognise, name and appreciate these plants deepening your connection to the local environment.

Jo Matthews, Indigenous Seed Project coordinator

Kangaroo Grass

Themeda triandra

Family : Poaceae

Description:

Kangaroo Grass is an elegant, perennial grass, with tall nodding seed heads in summer. Leaves are broad for a native grass and grow in a dense tuft, 60cm tall to 75cm wide. The distinctive seed heads occur in papery clusters on the stem with a prominent, dark-colored bristle (awn) extending from each seed. Starts flowering in September with seed ripening in December/January when foliage has turned rusty coloured.

Growing Conditions

While moderately tolerant of drought and a wide range of soil types, growth is most lush in moist sites and on deeper soil. Prefers full sun and is moderately tolerant of frosts to -5 degrees C.

Cultivation and Maintenance:

A robust, trouble-free plant, with no special attention required. This is a “summer -active” grass, with a high tolerance of heat and drought once established. It is rejuvenated from cutting back or a cautious burn. If plants are trimmed to 200mm after some early rain in autumn, while the ground is still warm, the new growth will remain green through winter. Annual trimming is recommended when growing this grass in combination with smaller flowering perennials, to avoid smothering the smaller plants.



Kangaroo Grass seeds separating from the awns. Photo - Jo Matthews

Cultural Values:

Prior to European invasion Kangaroo Grass was an important food for many indigenous groups, with its seeds made into porridge or ground to make flour for bread. According to local elder Aunty Julie McHale; "The flour produced from Kangaroo Grass is gluten-free and light and tasty, it can be easily stored and the Dja Dja Wurrung people wrapped the bread made from flour in paper-bark keeping it in stone recesses to protect from animals".

Encouragingly, a renewed focus on native grasses and their potential for grain supply and animal grazing, has meant Kangaroo Grass is beginning to be grown on a large scale (see Guardian article 'Time to embrace history of country': Bruce Pascoe and the first dancing grass harvest in 200 years). Being perennial and adapted to tough conditions, Kangaroo grass could be the answer to sustainable farming of grain as climate change worsens. *

*Note: Traditions vary between indigenous communities, not all descriptions are specific to the Dja Dja Wurrung people.

Websites cited:

www.recreatingthecountry.com.au

www.tuckerbush.com.au

Aboriginal Plant Use - Australian Plant Information
(anbg.gov.au)

Garden Value:

Being a summer-active plant, these grasses look good when other garden plants are dying off or wilting. The attractive tussocks with arching seed-heads, are a beautiful feature when scattered through a naturalistic border or grassland garden. Dense swathes of Kangaroo grass are striking when bronzed in late summer and help to suppress annual weeds when established. Taking inspiration from native grasslands, this grass looks stunning in a garden when combined with flowering perennials such as native daisies, lilies, peas and Blue Devil.

Ecology:

One of the most widespread native grasses in Australia, once dominating temperate grasslands and woodlands, but now greatly depleted due to grazing and farming. It is an icon of Victoria's endangered grasslands. It does not grow in winter in cooler climates but thrives in hot weather. In contrast to cool-season grasses such as Wallaby grasses and Poas, growth, germination and flowering of Kangaroo Grass is stimulated by warmer temperatures. An important host plant for caterpillars of the Ringed Xenica and the Common and Shouldered Brown Butterflies.

Seed collection and propagation:

Collect seed into paper bag from late December to late January. Using old pillowcases can be useful as the seed will separate from the awn, drilling into to the fabric. Sow it immediately or the following December. Sow uncovered on seed tray. You may notice when you water in the seeds they will start to move, this is the seed attempting to drill down into propagating medium. It can be helpful to direct the seed down to encourage this drilling action. If sowing into a tray, the seeds can be pricked out at 6 weeks into tubes. Seedlings can be planted out in May. Themeda seed remains viable for approx 7 years at room temperature.



Kangaroo Grass gently arching
in the breeze. Photo - Eliza-Jane
Gilchrist