

Seeking out serrated tussock

SERRATED tussock was first introduced to Australia in about 1900 and in 1938 was proclaimed noxious in several shires in the Southern Tablelands.

It has now been declared noxious in many parts of NSW, Victoria and Tasmania.

From 1976 to 2003 surveys revealed that the total area infested in NSW had increased from 680,000ha to 820,000ha. Correct identification of serrated tussock is essential to prevent the spread of the weed to clean areas. Several key features - listed here courtesy of the NSW Department of Primary Industries (DPI) - can be used to distinguish it from similar tussock-forming grasses.

Size: Mature tussocks can vary in size

depending on soil fertility. On fertile soil, tussocks can grow to 45cm in height and have a diameter at the base of 25cm. On infertile soil they can be smaller.

Colour: Serrated tussock varies in colour throughout the year and is most recognisable during flowering in late spring/summer when the flower heads have a strong purple tinge. After flowering in late summer, when seed heads are fully developed, they are golden brown above a light green tussock base. In late autumn and winter, frosting bleaches the tussocks a golden yellow. In early to mid spring the tussocks are light green with brown tips. When recovering from burning or slashing, the

tussocks have a light green appearance.

Leaves: Serrated tussock leaves are tightly rolled, narrow, stiff and upright. They have small serrations that can be felt when the leaf is drawn between the fingers. Although the common name 'serrated tussock' suggests that these serrations are a key feature of the weed, reliance on serrations alone for identification can be misleading as other tussock grasses can have similar serrations.

Ligule: The ligule is the most useful guide for identifying serrated tussock. To find it, trace down a leaf to its junction with the leaf sheath (the junction with the next leaf). Slowly separate and

bend the leaf back, and a small, white hairless flap 1mm long will protrude vertically

Leaf bases: The leaf bases of serrated tussock are whitish and 'shallot like'. *Austrostipa* spp. (speargrass, corkscrew) have purple leaf bases, which can be found by removing the brown leaf sheaths.

Flowering: Serrated tussock generally flowers during mid to late spring, and the seeds develop in early to mid-summer.

For further information on the identification of serrated tussock, or for ways to control its spread, visit the DPI website at www.dpi.nsw.gov.au



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