

Wallaby Grass (*Austrodanthonia* spp.)

For those wanting to grow a native grass in medium rainfall environments, wallaby grass is a logical choice. It is a winter active grass, but with adequate soil moisture it will continue to grow through the spring and summer months with up to 2 periods of seed production during this time. In wet summers, this feature can be very useful for utilizing excess moisture and maintaining tractor access down the mid-rows for spraying operations. Not all of the 35 species of wallaby grass are grown commercially, but there are numerous varieties available providing a range of growth habits. Sowing a mix of species adapted to particular environments enhances the likelihood of a successful establishment and increases the diversity of the sward. While seed costs for establishment are expensive, the cost may be amortised over 10 or so years, and with low management costs it becomes a cheaper option than annual cover crops.

Soil types

Soil preferences vary between species of wallaby grass. Some known preferences are shown below.

Species	Soil texture preferred
<i>Austrodanthonia richardsonii</i>	Clay to light sandy loams
<i>Austrodanthonia caespitosa</i>	Prefers sandy soils, but can grow in clays to sandy loams
<i>Austrodanthonia bipitarta</i> / <i>Austrodanthonia fulva</i>	Prefers non-sandy soils, but can grow in clay to sandy loams

Uses

An established stand of *Austrodanthonia richardsonii* has been observed to suppress both caltrop (*Tribulis terrestris*) and wireweed (*Polygonum aviculare*), negating the need for herbicides or cultivation for their control. Trials have shown wallaby grass to be very compatible with mature vineyards as vine production is not compromised yet weeds are suppressed and habitat for beneficial insects is provided.

Cultural practices

Wallaby grass seed is available in a pelletised form, which enables it to be sown through some conventional seeders, but often a specialized machine is required. Because the seedlings lack vigour, a seedbed free of grass seed is required to prevent early competition from the exotic species. Optimal seeding time is April to May while soil temperatures are above 20 °C. Late winter and spring sowings are also possible and often necessary for weed control prior to sowing. Seeding depth is on the surface or very close to it, with seed to soil contact in the seed furrow improved with press wheels. There is no need for additional fertilizer. Following emergence, monitor for broadleaf weeds and treat with herbicide if necessary (see Native ground covers in GRDC information sheet). In the first year allow seed set of the wallaby grass prior to mowing. Mow to reduce seed set in annual grasses and to restrict growth of wallaby grass if required.



Wallaby grass fits neatly as a mid-row cover crop, and looks spectacular in head.

Further reading

For general information about native grasses

<http://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/agriculture/field/pastures-and-rangelands/rangelands/publications/grassedup/about>

<http://www.nativegrassgroup.asn.au/>

<http://www.stipa.com.au/>

Penfold C (2010) Native grass cover crops. *Australian and New Zealand Grapegrower and Winemaker* (March)

For further information and seed supply

<http://www.nativeseeds.com.au/>

<http://www.floravictoria.com.au/>

<http://www.nativegrasses.com.au/>

<http://www.seedworld.com.au/>