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Plant of the month: Coast Sword-sedge *Lepidosperma gladiatum*



Coast Sword-sedge *Lepidosperma gladiatum* is a robust perennial sedge found commonly in primary dune scrub at Venus Bay. It grows in rhizomatous clumps with erect stems or culms with a biconvex ridge and sharp edges, to 1 m high and 5-20 mm in diameter. The leaves are similar but flatter and as long or exceeding the culms. The flowerhead is a dense panicle, 4-18 cm x 3-7 cm, with numerous sessile, pale brown spikelets to 8 mm long, from spring to summer. The nut is shiny-brown and wrinkled. Coast Sword-sedge grows in all states except Queensland and Northern Territory.

Coast Sword-sedge grows in full sun or semi-shade on well-drained soil. The *Lepidosperma* genus is an important food and habitat source for birds, small animals and caterpillars. Aborigines ate the tender leaf bases and the entire leaf was used in basket making. It is difficult to grow from seed but may be propagated by division.

Lepidosperma belongs in the Cyperaceae or sedge family. The genus name *Lepidosperma* is from the Greek *lepis*, *lepidos*, a scale, and *sperma*, seed, referring to scales that surround the nut. *Gladiatum* is from the Latin *gladius* meaning sword, from the shape of the leaves. Photo: Lorraine Norden.

