

## Whittlesea weed fact sheet – Chilean Needle Grass (*Nassella neesiana*)

Weed of national significance. Declared noxious weed regionally controlled in Port Phillip East

### Issue

Chilean needle grass is an extremely invasive grassy weed. As each square metre of infestation produces up to 12,000 seeds, it can quickly degrade native grasslands and pastures. Chilean needle grass is a master of disguise. It looks similar to many other grasses, both native and introduced, and can readily blend into the landscape.

Chilean needle grass also has a more sinister side. As the name suggests, its seeds are needle sharp and can easily pierce the skin or hides of the toughest animal, resulting in serious animal health issues. Commonly the fleece of sheep become contaminated with its seeds, making shearing difficult. Some farmers have been forced to stop grazing sheep due to the impacts of Chilean needle grass.

### Local scene

Locally known as either needle grass, Tat's grass or corkscrew, Chilean needle grass can be found growing on many farms and adjoining roadsides in the southern rural zone of the municipality.

It has flourished on the dark clays, although it is not entirely restricted to this soil type. It has been in the local area for over 50 years but only became a widely known problem since the early 1990's when large patches became easier to identify. Within the City of Whittlesea, Chilean needle grass is commonly found in:

- Epping
- Donnybrook
- Doreen
- Mernda
- Woodstock
- Wollert

**Council Offices**  
25 Ferres Boulevard  
South Morang VIC 3752  
  
Locked Bag 1  
Bundoora MDC VIC 3083

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[www.whittlesea.vic.gov.au](http://www.whittlesea.vic.gov.au)

#### Free Telephone Interpreter Service

عربي	9679 9871	Hrvatski	9679 9872
廣東話	9679 9857	Ελληνικά	9679 9873
Italiano	9679 9874	Türkçe	9679 9877
Македонски	9679 9875	Việt-ngữ	9679 9878
普通话	9679 9876	Other	9679 9879

## Problem land management practices

Some land management practices contribute to the spread of weeds. Landowners can unintentionally spread Chilean needle grass by:

- Slashing, especially during the peak flowering season
- Importing soil or fill that is contaminated with weed seed
- Using dirty machinery that is contaminated with soil and weedy material
- Purchasing fodder/hay that contains weed seeds
- Importing livestock carrying seeds on their coats and/or within their stomachs
- Allowing pastures to become rundown and degraded

Selecting the most suitable control technique is crucial. Integrating a number of weed control techniques is often more effective in the longer term. The most important part of any weed management program is to maintain control and prevent re-infestation. Re-planting the treated area with desirable plants and regular monitoring is essential to prevent re-infestation.

Refer to the City's 'Seasonal Guide to Weed Management' for more information on integrated weed control options. Visit [www.whittlesea.vic.gov.au](http://www.whittlesea.vic.gov.au) (key word search: seasonal guide) or email [Sustainability@whittlesea.vic.gov.au](mailto:Sustainability@whittlesea.vic.gov.au) for your copy of the Guide.

You may also contact Council's Sustainable Land Management Officer on (03) 9217 2493 for further advice or for a copy of the Guide.

## Identification tips

Chilean needle grass can often only be identified easily when in full flower. To find this weed you will need to become familiar with a few key identification features described below.

**Flower/seed:** The sharp panicle (aerial) seed is approximately 10mm in length. Covering each seed are 2 purple bracts (wings) which give it a characteristic purple colour of flowering.

A corona (raised ring) can be located between seed and tail. This ring can be many different colours including beige, bluish or purple to dark brown. It is a myth that the ring is always purple. Note: Native spear grasses do not have a raised ring.

Cleistogene (hidden) seeds can often be found in the nodes (elbows) of flowering stems, including those at the base of the plant. To find these seeds, carefully peel the leaf sheaf back from the stem to reveal approximately 5 small sesame seed-like seeds in a row.

The awn (tail) winds the seed like a corkscrew to bury or firmly fix the seed in place. The needle-sharp seed can easily pierce the skin of animals.

**Leaves:** Narrow, coarse leaves with distinct ribs running from base to tip. Approximately 20-30cm in length with slightly serrated margins (edges). Colouration varies from lime to mid-green, often with yellowish blotches. Plants can look as though they are suffering nutrient deficiencies.

**Form:** Tussock-forming, grassy plant with a dense fibrous root system. Grows to a height of around 50cm depending on its location and management. Heavily grazed or slashed plants will develop a bare centre with age and flowering stems will tend to grow along the ground, rather than upright.

Accurate identification is essential. If you are not sure whether you have this weed on your property, contact Council's Sustainable Land Management Officer for further advice on (03) 9217 2493 or email [Sustainability@whittlesea.vic.gov.au](mailto:Sustainability@whittlesea.vic.gov.au).

## Contacts

Australian Pesticide and Veterinary Medicines Authority (APVMA) [www.apvma.gov.au](http://www.apvma.gov.au) Tel. (02) 6272 5852

City of Whittlesea Sustainability Planning Unit [www.whittlesea.vic.gov.au](http://www.whittlesea.vic.gov.au) Tel. (03) 9217 2493

Department of Primary Industries (DPI) [www.dpi.vic.gov.au](http://www.dpi.vic.gov.au) Tel. 136 186

DPI Chemical Information Service [www.dpi.vic.gov.au](http://www.dpi.vic.gov.au) Tel. (03) 9210 9379

## Further reading

Keith Turnbull Research Institute (May 1999) Landcare Note: Chilean needle grass—identification, LC0256, Frankston.

Department of Primary Industries -Tyers, Grech & Baldyga (January, 2004) Landcare Notes: Machinery Hygiene, LC0425.

## Disclaimer

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