

Paspalum distichum

COMMON NAME

Mercer grass

SYNONYMS

Paspalum paspalodes

FAMILY

Poaceae

AUTHORITY

Paspalum distichum L.

FLORA CATEGORY

Vascular – Exotic

STRUCTURAL CLASS

Grasses

NVS CODE

PASDIS

CONSERVATION STATUS

Not applicable

BRIEF DESCRIPTION

Floating grass forming dense mats, with typical two-pronged lowerheads produced in summer.

DISTRIBUTION

Locally common in the North Island but also in the South Island as far south as Canterbury.

HABITAT

Still and slow flowing water bodies and wetland margins.

WETLAND PLANT INDICATOR STATUS RATING

FACW: Facultative Wetland

Usually is a hydrophyte but occasionally found in uplands (non-wetlands).

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Creeping, perennial, mat-forming grass, the stems sprawl along the ground and then grow to 60 cm tall. **Stolons** long, rooting frequently, with rhizomes. **Leaves** are distantly alternate, the lamina is 4-10 cm long and 2-6mm wide, tip pointed, bluish-green, soft and lax, slightly hairy above and below, rolled and hairy at base. **Ligule** up to 4 mm, membrane-like, whitish-translucent, often torn. **Auricle** absent. **Sheath** with reddish-purple tinge. **Seedhead** of 2 (sometimes 1 or 3) diverging, erect racemes, 25–50 mm long; with softly hairy spikelets.

SIMILAR TAXA

Kikuyu grass (*Cenchrus clandestinus*). Differs from Mercer grass in that Kikuyu grass lacks a membranous ligule and has a short flowering head that is almost enclosed within the leaves. In contrast, Mercer grass has a very distinctive forked flowering head.

FLOWERING

November, December, January, February

FLOWER COLOURS

Green



Paspalum distichum. Photographer: John Smith-Dodsworth, Licence: CC BY-NC.



Paspalum distichum. Photographer: John Smith-Dodsworth, Licence: CC BY-NC.

FRUITING

Late summer

LIFE CYCLE

Perennial. Reproduces by seed and stem fragmentation. Seeds freely, seed viability unknown. Dispersed by water, livestock pelts and hooves (possibly seed in dung). Contaminated diggers and dumped vegetation.

YEAR NATURALISED

1887

ORIGIN

Europe

REASON FOR INTRODUCTION

Forage grass for wet areas

CONTROL TECHNIQUES

Not usually controlled in New Zealand, but may be controlled by mowing or herbicidally.

TOLERANCES

Tolerates wet, hot to mod-cool, wind, damage and grazing, most soils. Intolerant of frost, deep shade and dry conditions.

ETYMOLOGY

paspalum: The Greek name for millet

ATTRIBUTION

Factsheet prepared by Paul Champion and Deborah Hofstra (NIWA).

REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

Champion P. et al. 2020. Freshwater Invasive Species of New Zealand 2020. NIWA publication.

<https://docs.niwa.co.nz/library/public/FreInSpec.pdf>

MORE INFORMATION

<https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/paspalum-distichum/>