

KIKUYU *Pennisetum clandestinum*

G9
GRASS



stamen

male flowers in Kikuyu sward



ligule

hairy sheath

KIKUYU

Pennisetum clandestinum



Alternative name: Kikuyu Grass.

Family: Poaceae.

Description: A spreading rhizomatous and stoloniferous perennial that roots at the nodes and forms dense swards to 50 cm high when ungrazed. Seedheads much reduced and hidden (hence 'clandestinum') in the apices of some stolons of well established plants.

Key features: Flowers in summer and stamens are exerted first en masse and appear as whisps of white web across the sward (see photo) and last for a day or two, followed by the much shorter feathery stigmas. Seeds can survive passing through the digestive tract of ruminants.

Value: On non-saline land Kikuyu is major pasture species and used widely, for example in dairy farming. There are a number of cultivars notably Whittet and Noonan. No information is available on its use in saltland, however on non-saline land digestibility declines from early summer to late autumn. Swards are likely to be of better value in autumn if hard grazed in summer. Responds to the application of fertilisers.

Salinity and waterlogging tolerance: Moderate tolerance to waterlogging, low tolerance to inundation and low tolerance to salinity. In its native range it grows on the margin of forest where rainfall is more than 1000 mm/yr.

Notes: Native of the highland plateaus of east and central Africa. Introduced to Australia from Congo in 1919.

References: *Saltland Pastures in Australia*, Barrett-Lennard, 2003. *Flora of NSW*, Harden (ed), Vol. 4, 1993. *Flora of Victoria*, Walsh and Entwisle (eds), Vol. 2, 1994.

