

# Itch grass

## Itch grass

*Rottboellia cochinchinensis*

## Introduction

Itch grass is native to the Old World tropics, but is currently widespread throughout the world's tropical regions and occurs in sugarcane fields in many countries. This plant is an erect, coarse, cane-like, annual grass growing to 3 metres. It is unpalatable to livestock and wildlife.

## Description

Stems are cylindrical, hollow and branch from the upper nodes. Prop roots grow down from the lower nodes. Leaves and leaf sheaths are covered in stiff hairs that cause irritation if allowed to penetrate skin.

Leaves are blue-green in colour, flat, 5-20 mm wide, about 50 cm long and with rough edges. Flower heads, which branch out from the upper nodes, are in the form of spikes about 10 cm long. As the heads mature, the cylindrical seeds progressively break free from the end and fall to the ground.

## Distribution

Itch grass has invaded sugarcane fields in different districts in Australia from time to time and is difficult to manage once established – as experienced in the Burdekin district. Because of its size and vigorous growth it competes strongly with sugarcane, and heavy infestations cause severe crop loss.

## Management

The most successful prevention strategy is to stop the spread of this invasive plant between farms. All machinery entering and leaving a farm enterprise should be cleaned and be free of loose dirt and any other material that may harbour itch grass seeds.



The most commonly used herbicides to control itch grass within sugarcane fields are hexazinone + diuron (Velpar® K4) or MSMA (Daconate®) + diuron. Asulam (Asulam 400, Asulox®, Rattler®) may also be used as a salvage spray.