
MANGROVES OF THE NORTHERN TERRITORY, AUSTRALIA:

IDENTIFICATION and TRADITIONAL USE

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EXTRACT: *Cynodon* (pp. 79–81)

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DARWIN 2006

Cynodon**POACEAE**

DERIVATION: The Greek 'kyno' means dog, and 'odontous' means tooth, in reference to the rhizome buds which resemble dogs' teeth.

A genus of some 15 taxa (including varieties), five species occur in Australia, three of which are considered to be introduced. One native species, *C. dactylon*, is widespread and regularly occurs in NT tidal areas.

Cynodon dactylon* (L.) Pers.*Mangrove Couch-grass**

DERIVATION: The Greek 'daktylos' means finger or toe, and refers to the inflorescence, which is hand-like.

DESCRIPTION: Perennial, stoloniferous or rhizomatous grass; sterile culms prostrate and rooting at nodes; fertile culms erect, to 15 cm high. Culms with short internodes; stolons usually compressed. Leaf blades 1.5–7.1 x 0.1–0.2 cm, flat or conduplicate, subobtuse, glabrous, scaberulous; ligule 0.3 mm long. Leaf sheath half as long as internodes, orifice with hairs to 3 mm long. Spikes curved. Glumes 1.5 mm long, narrow-lanceolate, acuminate, keel scabrous, thickened. Rachilla internode 1 mm long. Lemma 2–3 mm long, membranous, obtuse, glabrous, smooth, keel ciliate. Palea narrow, subacute, smooth, glabrous, keel scabrous. Anthers 1 mm long. Grain 1 mm long, ellipsoid or obovoid, turgid, obtuse, pallid to brown.

HABITAT: *Cynodon dactylon* is found in a wide variety of habitats, including tidal areas where it can withstand twice daily submersion in seawater. Generally *C. dactylon* is found toward the rear of the mangal in areas that are less frequently inundated, on a variety of soils including laterite, sand, gravel and dark clays.

DISTRIBUTION: *Cynodon dactylon* is widespread around the entire NT coast. *Cynodon dactylon* also occurs in all other Australian states, and is regarded as being cosmopolitan, native to warm regions and cultivated or naturalised in the more temperate regions.

DISTINCTIVE FEATURES: Perennial grass with prostrate stems which root at the nodes; seed head 3-4 armed; seed to 1 mm long.

ETHNOBOTANY: In Vietnam cattle and goats are grazed on this grass and several other mangrove species at low tide (Hong & Sang 1987).

NOTES: *Cynodon dactylon* is a very hardy, salt tolerant species, capable of forming a thick lawn-like mat in areas subjected to twice daily tidal submersion.

Varieties of *C. dactylon* are cultivated throughout the world as a pasture and lawn species. It is commonly called 'couch grass' or 'mangrove couch grass'.

Fertile spikes are produced from May to October.

All material of *C. dactylon* examined from the NT is referable to variety *dactylon*.

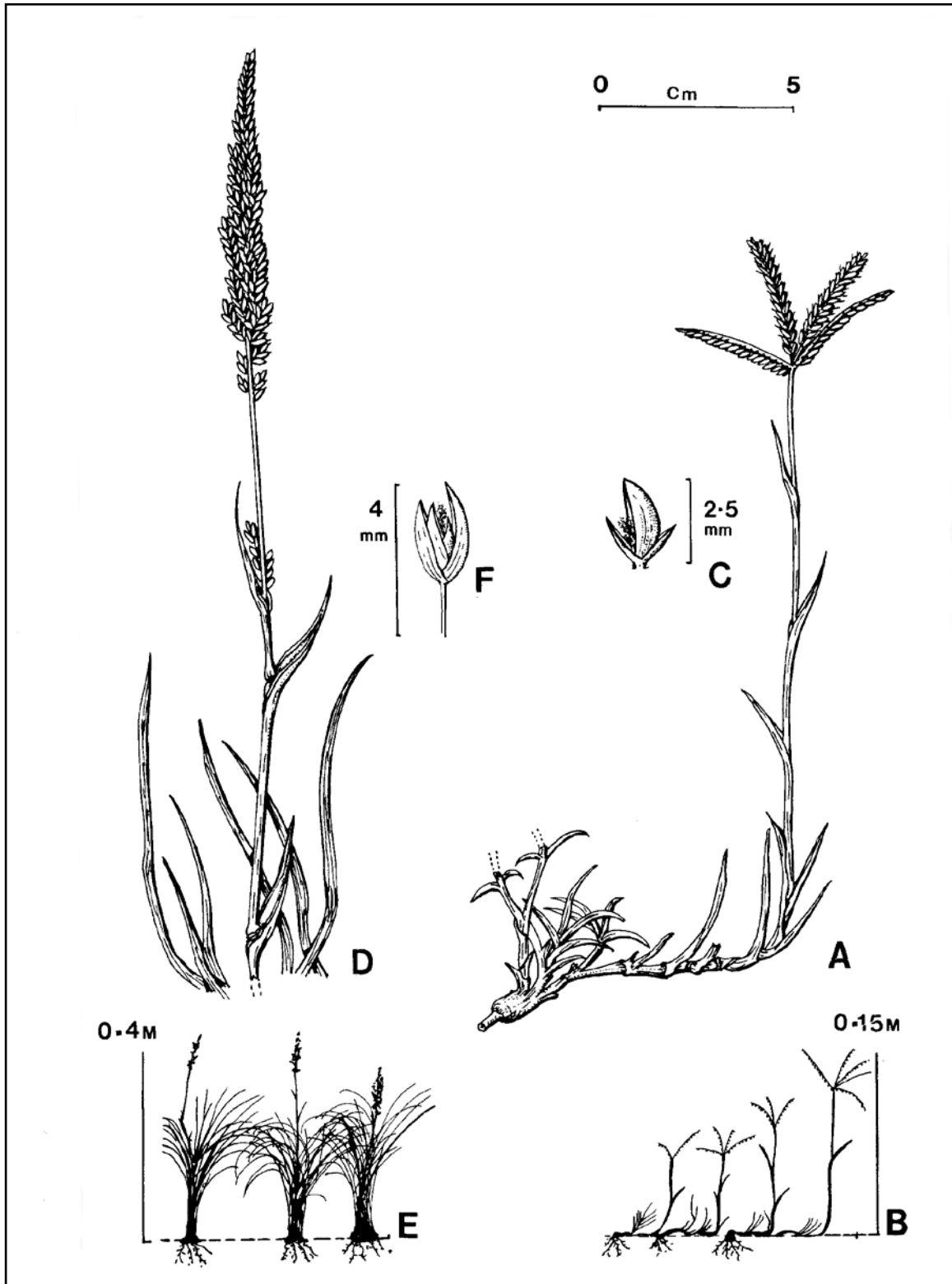


Figure 21. *Cynodon dactylon* and *Sporobolus virginicus*. A–C, *Cynodon dactylon*. A, fertile culm; B, habit; C, spikelet (A–C, M. Rankin 2407, DNA). D–F, *Sporobolus virginicus*. D, fertile culm; E, habit; F, spikelet (D–F, C. Robinson s.n., DNA 5671).