
MANGROVES OF THE NORTHERN TERRITORY, AUSTRALIA:

IDENTIFICATION and TRADITIONAL USE

Glenn Wightman

Ethnobiology Project, Parks and Wildlife Service
Department of Natural Resources, Environment and the Arts
PO Box 496, Palmerston NT 0831, Australia



Northern Territory Government



Principal Illustrator

Milton Andrews

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EXTRACT: *Sporobolus* (pp. 139–140)

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DARWIN 2006

Sporobolus

POACEAE

DERIVATION: The Greek 'sporo' meaning seed, and 'bolos' meaning throwing, in reference to the easily shed seeds.

A genus of about 100 species, dispersed in tropical regions of the world; in Australia 19 species are represented (four are introduced). Seven species occur in the NT; one, *S. virginicus*, is regularly found in tidal areas.

***Sporobolus virginicus* (L.) Kunth**

Mangrove Couch-grass

DERIVATION: Species named from Virginia, in the United States of America, where this species is called 'Virginian drop seed'.

DESCRIPTION: Perennial grass, rhizomatous, creeping, slender, branching; culms erect, to 40 cm high. Leaf sheaths imbricate, orifice hairy; leaf blade flat or involute, tapering to a fine point, conspicuously distichous, to 5 cm long. Panicle spike-like, dense, contracted, 7.4–10.0 x 0.5–2.5 cm; spikelets often leaden-coloured, 2–2.5 mm long, floret single. Glumes subequal, upper slightly longer, narrow lanceolate, keeled, acute, glabrous, strongly 1-nerved. Lemma subequal to glumes, glabrous, shining; palea longer than lemma. Stamens 2–3. Ovary globose; styles free, short; stigmas plumose, laterally exerted. Grain broadly obvoid, pericarp thin.

HABITAT: *Sporobolus virginicus* occurs in coastal and inland areas, it regularly occurs in rear mangal, tidal situations where it forms dense, low mats. Sandy soils are preferred, as are areas with a high salinity. Associates include *Halosarcia* spp., *Excoecaria ovalis*, *Lumnitzera racemosa* and *Avicennia marina*.

DISTRIBUTION: *Sporobolus virginicus* is widespread and common around the entire NT coast, it is found in all Australian states. Extra-Australian records include Africa, Malesia, the Americas and the Pacific Islands.

DISTINCTIVE FEATURES: Grass forming upright clumps, stems below ground.

ETHNOBOTANY: No specific uses have been reported for this grass, though several names have been recorded.

Recorded Aboriginal language names

Yuka (Ngarinyman)

Matharlmantharl (Yanyuwa)

Juru (Ngarinyman)

Maawaagil (Kunwinjku)

In Vietnam cattle and goats are grazed on this grass and several other mangrove species at low tide (Hong & San 1993).

NOTES: *Sporobolus virginicus* produces fertile culms throughout the year. Buffalo have been observed grazing this mat forming perennial (pers. obs.). All material of *S. virginicus* from coastal areas of the NT is referable to var. *virginicus*.

Refer to Figure 21 (page 82), for drawing of *S. virginicus* with *Cynodon dactylon*.

Reference: Simon 1982.
