

MARINE COUCH

Sporobolus virginicus

G10
GRASS



MARINE COUCH

Sporobolus virginicus



Alternative names: Sand Couch, Salt Couch, Saltwater Couch.

Family: Poaceae.

Description: Creeping rhizomatous and stoloniferous perennial to 50 cm tall. Characterised by two rows of sharp stiff leaves on opposite sides of the same flat plane (see photo). Ligule a rim of hairs (see photo). Flowers mostly early summer through to autumn but does not always set viable seed. *Sporobolus virginicus* var. *virginicus* has leaves 3–5 mm wide whereas the fine-leaved form *S. virginicus* var. *minor* has leaves generally less than 2 mm wide.

Key features: Tight spike to 10 cm long and 1 cm wide with tiny florets (flowers) 2–4 mm long. Seedhead projected above the leaves. Scattered tubercle (wart on base of hair) hairs on leaf sheath.

Value: The narrow-leaved forms can provide useful grazing but the coarse broad-leaved forms have much lower forage value. It is an important grazing plant for cattle during the dry season in northern Australia. Little is known about its grazing management.

Salinity and waterlogging tolerance: High tolerance to waterlogging and moderate to high tolerance to salinity as it thrives in frequently tidally inundated saltmarsh and is useful for stabilising sea-shores, and an ecologically important component of tidal saltmarsh.

Notes: Native of all States. Common along the Australian coastline. Inland records probably refer to the closely related *S. mitchellii* which is less tolerant to waterlogging and salinity.

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

