

Grass Trees

Xanthorrhoea australis

Xanthorrhoea minor

At a Glance...

Size:

Can grow up to six metres tall.

Habitat:

Coastal heaths, wet and dry forests.

What Is a Grass Tree?

Grass Trees are one of Australia's most amazing and iconic plants. Growing only in Australia there are several different species including four that grow in Victoria.

There are many differences between grass tree species. Some have a trunk and look a bit like a tree above the ground, growing up to six metres tall, whilst others are much lower and grow their trunks below ground.

Species such as *Xanthorrhoea australis* (Austral Grass Tree) grow a trunk. The trunk is composed of a mass of old leaf bases held together by natural resin which can take ten years before it begins to form. It is then a further twenty years or more before a mass of thin leaves emerge. It's a very slow growing plant, at a rate of one to two centimetres in height per year, growing one metre every 100 years!

Other species such as *Xanthorrhoea minor* (Small Grass Tree) do not grow a trunk above ground. It's fine leaves grow from the base of the plant at ground level. Flowering occurs twice to three times each year in mature plants. The flowering stalks grow rapidly at a rate of



2-3 centimetres per day and reach a height of around three metres.

Amazingly, Grass Trees have a lifespan of up to 600 years!

Grass Trees are also closely related to other sedges such as *Lomandra* spp., with which it share many similarities.

Uses

A wide range of lizards and insects shelter in the Grass Trees massive foliage. When in flower, the spear of the plant attracts nectar feeding birds, bees, ants, and butterflies.

For Victorian Aborigines including the Wotjobaluk, the Wathaurung and the Gunai/Kurnai, grass trees are a staple plant providing food, drink, fibre and materials for making implements.

Pieces of dry flower stalk can be used for making fire with a drilling stick, while leaves collected from the base of the trunk produce a hard resin which can be

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used for waterproofing bark canoes and water carrying vessels. The tall flower spear can also be used for hunting purposes, with the resin used to fix a sharp point to the end.

Threats

Although protected in National Parks, unfortunately the Grass Tree has been a victim of land clearing. To conserve them they are sometimes removed before an area is cleared and replanted elsewhere.

Grass Trees are also increasingly threatened by the root rot disease *Phytophthora cinnamomi*.

Fortunately they are becoming increasingly popular in private gardens due to their ability to survive harsh weather conditions and survive without water and regular maintenance.

Where Do Grass Trees Grow?

Grass Trees grow in coastal heaths, wet and dry forests of Australia. They are drought and frost tolerant.

Some good places to view Grass Trees in Victorian parks include, the Brisbane Ranges, Little Desert and Grampians National Parks.

Want to Know More?

www.parkweb.vic.gov.au

www.anbg.gov.au

Fascinating Facts:

- Lifespan of up to 600 years!
- Grass Trees grow 1-2 centimetres in height each year.