

Cenchrus ciliaris

[Synonyms : *Cenchrus aequiglumis*, *Cenchrus anjana*, *Cenchrus bulbosus*, *Cenchrus ciliaris* var. *anachoreticus*, *Cenchrus ciliaris* var. *genuina*, *Cenchrus ciliaris* var. *genuinus*, *Cenchrus ciliaris* var. *leptostachys*, *Cenchrus ciliaris* var. *nubicus*, *Cenchrus ciliaris* var. *pallens*, *Cenchrus ciliaris* var. *pennisetiformis*, *Cenchrus ciliaris* var. *villiferus*, *Cenchrus digynus*, *Cenchrus echinoides*, *Cenchrus glaucus*, *Cenchrus lappaceus*, *Cenchrus longifolius*, *Cenchrus mutabilis*, *Cenchrus pennisetiformis*, *Cenchrus pennisetiformis* var. *intermedia*, *Cenchrus pennisetiformis* var. *rigidifolia*, *Cenchrus pennisetiformis* var. *typica*, *Cenchrus pubescens*, *Cenchrus rigidifolius*, *Cenchrus rufescens*, *Panicum vulpinum*, *Pennisetum cenchroides*, *Pennisetum cenchroides* var. *echinoides*, *Pennisetum cenchroides* var. *hamphilahense*, *Pennisetum ciliare*, *Pennisetum ciliare* var. *anachoreticum*, *Pennisetum ciliare* var. *genuina*, *Pennisetum ciliare* var. *leptostachys*, *Pennisetum ciliare* var. *pallens*, *Pennisetum ciliare* var. *robustior*, *Pennisetum ciliare* var. *setigerum*, *Pennisetum distylum*, *Pennisetum incomptum*, *Pennisetum longifolium*, *Pennisetum petraeum*, *Pennisetum polycladum*, *Pennisetum prieurii*, *Pennisetum rangei*, *Pennisetum rufescens*, *Pennisetum teneriffae*, *Pennisetum vulpina*]

BUFFEL GRASS is a perennial grass. Native from Africa to India and Indonesia it has bristly bun-like, often purple-tinged, pale green flower spikelets.

It is also known as African foxtail, *Anjan* (Hindi), Anjangrass, and Buffell grass.

The seeds are dispersed by animals coats (to which they cling) and by the wind. Even tiny pieces of root will re-sprout.

Ciliaris is derived from Latin *cilum* (eyelash, eyelid) meaning ‘edged with hairs or fringed with fine hairs’.

Records show that locally the seeds have long been eaten raw or mixed with millet (*Panicum miliaceum*) to make bread.

Not only is buffel grass valued as ground cover (particularly for stabilizing soil) but it also provides a drought-tolerant forage for livestock – not least in the drier and hotter regions of India where it is also a source of hay. Added to this whether green grass, silage or hay it is believed to encourage sleek and glossy coats or hides and enhance the flow of milk in cattle.

Dried shoots of buffel grass are said to make admirable fuel.

This drought resistant grass was introduced to Australia, some say in the 1860s in Afghan camel harnesses brought into western Australia while others point to the later more deliberate importation as ground cover for erosion control and for animal feed. In either event it has become rampant in some areas. (Recent research has indicated that it may emit chemicals into the soil that could inhibit the growth of some of the surrounding vegetation. It certainly escapes from cultivation and spreads through surrounding areas.) Whatever mechanism is at work however buffel grass is causing much concern as where it becomes invasive it pushes out natural vegetation to the detriment of native fauna, changes the landscape and causes an imbalance in the fire régime – not only does it provide a particularly good surface over which the fire can flow but afterwards this grass recovers so well (especially if encouraged by a little rain) that it envelops an ever greater area. Introduced to Hawaii for erosion control purposes too, buffel grass has become a

nuisance there as well. At the turn of the 20th/21st Centuries it has actually become the dominant grass on one of the Hawaiian islands. Buffel grass was only introduced to the North American Continent in 1948 and parts of Texas and the Sonoran Desert running into northern Mexico (areas for which it is estimated that there could be a total of 8 million acres now of buffel grass pasture and livestock ranges between them) are experiencing the grass's downside. It has been providing invaluable heavy grazing but as it contains little plant diversity which could help it to resist a fungus to which it is susceptible, particularly in the drier areas, the pastures are being severely damaged. At the same time another threat has arisen if the grass has not succumbed to the fungal blight. It was mooted in 1977 that the Sonoran cactus forests could become grassland because of the particularly good surface provided by this grass and referred to above over which fire can flow – an unheard of hazard for that region until now.

Medicinally, local herbalists have used buffel grass to treat kidney problems, fluid retention, tumours, sores and wounds.