

Cyperus rotundus

[Synonyms : *Chlorocyperus rotundus*, *Cyperus bicolor*, *Cyperus hexastachyos*, *Cyperus hexastachys*, *Cyperus maritimus*, *Cyperus olivaris*, *Cyperus tuberosus*, *Pycreus rotundus*]

COCO GRASS is an invasive perennial grass. Native to tropical Old World regions it has reddish-brown flower spikelets.

It is also known as Brown nut sedge, *Castañuela* (Spanish), *Coquito* (Spanish), Galingale, *Hamasuge* (Japanese), *Herbe à oignon* (French), *Junça* (Portuguese), *Juncia* (Spanish), *Kalanduru* (Singhalese), *Kili 'o 'opu* (Hawaiian), *Kotai* (Tamil), *Moth* (Gujarati), *Motha* (Hindi), *Mothe* (Nepalese), *Musta* (Sanskrit), Nutgrass, Nut sedge, Purple flatsedge, Purple nutsedge, Red nutgrass, Red nut sedge, *Rooiuintjie* (Afrikaans), *Rumput haliyahitam* (Malay), *Rundes Zypergras* (German), *Šáchor hlíznatý* (Czech), *Souchet à tubercules* (French), *Souchet rond* (French), *Suo cao* (Chinese), *Tungamuste* (Telugu), *Xiang fu zi* (Chinese), *Ya khon mu* (Thai), and *Zigolo infestante* (Italian).

An essential oil can be obtained from the aromatic tubers which is sometimes referred to as 'Souchet'.

The aromatic dried crushed underground stem has a cinnamon-like fragrance similar to that of sweet-flag (*Acorus calamus*).

Rotundus is Latin (round, circular) meaning 'rounded'.

The tubers are said to have been called *Radix junci* by the Romans. On the other hand the 1st Century Roman natural historian Pliny the Elder (23-79) refers to coco grass as *Juncus angulosus* and the grass is also mentioned earlier (in the 8th Century BC) by Homer in both *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*.

Herodotus (c.485-425 BC), the Greek historian, noted that the dried tubers were used by the Scythians (forebears of today's southern Russians) during their embalming process.

In India women have long used the dried, finely powdered roots as talcum powder. In fact the earliest known records from India, China and the eastern Mediterranean include mention of the use of the dried roots for perfume. In India the essential oil has been used to perfume the hair and clothing. Incidentally the oil has also been used to prepare insect repellent.

The leaves have been woven for hats and matting, and used for basketry.

Paiute North American Indians made the tubers into meal that was cooked as a cereal.

The edible nut-like tubers can be eaten raw or cooked and are highlighted by some authorities as a famine food.

The underground stems have been fed to pigs – and the leaves and stems have provided cattle fodder, for instance in Nigeria.

In more recent times coco grass has acquired a negative reputation and has been referred to as 'the world's worst weed'. At the turn of the 20th/21st Centuries coco grass has been declared an invasive plant in the majority of States in the United States – and also in Australia. But it looks as if help may soon be at hand in solving this. Research being carried out at about this time in North America has identified certain compounds in two plants (so far) *Mucuna deeringiana* (a close relative of cowhage, *Mucuna pruriens*) and Angola pea (*Cajanus cajan*) that might be successful in controlling the ever-increasing incursions made by coco grass in some regions.

Medicinally, coco grass has offered local cures in far flung places from Germany in western Europe to China and Cambodia, as well as those regions already referred to. In the latter it was used to treat fluid retention and period problems, and Indian medicine turned to it for expelling worms too, as well as digestive problems. In Cambodia a tuber decoction has been part of local remedies for malaria, liver disorders, stomach upsets, wind and headaches. Local Nigerian medicine has employed the tubers in remedies for easing children's coughs. It has also been used to treat asthma, cervical cancer, some venereal diseases and various skin problems.