



Pangolagrass

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Pangolagrass (*Digitaria eriantha*, formerly called *D. decumbens* and *D. pentzii*), also known as finger grass and digit grass, is a South African grass that offers some valuable features for sustainable farming systems in the tropics and subtropics. Once established, it provides soil cover and weed suppression for sunny or lightly shaded orchards. It is not considered invasive, unlike some other pasture grasses, because it does not produce seed and is easy to control or eliminate. Although the costs of establishment can be high, they can be offset by using the grass as a forage for grazing livestock.

Characteristics

Pangolagrass is a stoloniferous perennial introduced to Hawaii in 1935. It grows up to 4 ft (120 cm) tall. Its long, straight, sword-shaped leaves are 4–10 inches (10–25 cm) long and about 1/8–1/4 inch (2–7 mm) wide. The inflorescence has one or two whorls with 5–10 spikes, each up to 5 inches (13 cm) long and containing many spikelets about 1/8 inch (2.7–3.0 mm) long. Pangola grass is a deep-rooted plant.

Environmental requirements

Pangola grass grows on a wide range of soils but grows better on loams than on clays. It is tolerant of soil aluminum, which is often present in acidic tropical soils. It tolerates soil pH from 4.5 to 8.0. It is also moderately tolerant of soil salinity. This grass grows best under humid conditions with rainfall of 40 inches (1000 mm) or more per year. Pangola grass can withstand drought. It tolerates slight waterlogging—but not sustained flooding—and has fair shade tolerance. It is more sensitive to low soil nitrogen levels than carpetgrass or bahiagrass.

Benefits provided by pangola grass

EXCELLENT for providing erosion control, for suppressing weeds once established

GOOD for quick growth and establishment

TOLERATES partial shade and acidic soils with poor fertility and high aluminum levels

GOOD forage production, nutritional quality, and palatability

USE IN plantation and orchard cropping systems, such as macadamia and coffee

ESTABLISH vegetatively; seed is not available

It is better adapted to low fertility soils than kikuyugrass. In Hawaii, pangola grass grows year-round at elevations from sea level to 2500 ft, according to the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS).

Cultivars

'Transvala' and 'Pangola' cultivars are commonly recommended by NRCS. The 'Pangola' cultivar is reported to be resistant to root-knot nematodes.

Establishment

Pangola grass does not produce viable seed and is propagated vegetatively. If propagation material is limited and the area to be planted is large, it may be necessary to establish a nursery as a source of planting material.