



LEERSIA ORYZOIDES / PHALARIS ARUNDINACEA, VEGETATIVE

Leersia oryzoides (L.) Sw. and *Phalaris arundinacea* L. may grow together at the edge of water by ditches, canals and ponds. Where vegetative plants (c. 25 cm - 40 cm high, in late June - late July) are intermingled they can look superficially very alike with the same yellow-green colour and similar leaf-shape. The easiest way to tell them apart is by 'feel' - but *Leersia* is not called 'Cut Grass' for nothing! When fingers are run gently up the stems, the upper sheaths of *Leersia* have short, bristly, reflexed hairs between the ribs, and the rough leaf blades have spiny margins. *Leersia* is also hairy at the nodes.



Typical angles of leaves in *Leersia*. (Note some inflorescences beginning to open).

As the grasses grow taller, *Leersia* can be picked out by the angle of the leaf above the top sheath; this is held at a very characteristic angle of about 110° from the sheath (see illustration) and by August the top sheath often shows a distinct bulge where the panicle is developing inside the rolled sheath. In most years the panicles are not fully exerted or not exerted at all, in which case the spikelets are cleistogamous and the grains can mature inside the sheath. The panicles open freely only when there is both a warm spring and hot sunny weather in late summer. These are the years in which searches are likely to be most successful, and they have occurred about once in every 8-10 years over the last 50 years.

Leersia is now thought to be very rare but is easily over-looked. Full population details should be recorded for all sites.

Author M. Briggs, November 1997.