

A Simplified Key to 25 Common Urban Grasses

Spikelets in three distinctive clumps like chicken feet. Base of stem flattened.	Cock’s-foot (<i>Dactylis glomerata</i>)		
Inflorescence and open, branched panicle. Standard ‘grass-like’ leaves.	Spikelets compressed, lower branches longer than the upper forming a tapering inflorescence. Leaves with parallel tramlines and a boat-shaped tip (<i>Poa</i>) ¹	Short, wrinkled leaves. Panicle angled to one side.	Annual Meadow-grass (<i>Poa annua</i>)
		Upper leaf sheath noticeably rough to the touch; ligule long.	Rough Meadow-grass (<i>Poa trivialis</i>)
		Upper leaf sheath smooth to the touch; ligule short.	Smooth Meadow-grass (<i>Poa pratensis</i>)
		Narrow, shiny leaves; inflorescence large and graceful. Ligule short; sheath smooth.	Wood Meadow-grass (<i>Poa nemoralis</i>)
	Leaves pale, soft and hairy. Spikelets whitish or pinkish, glumes hairy (<i>Holcus</i>)	Flower spike pink when young. Ligule short; stem downy, base striped, pink.	Yorkshire Fog (<i>Holcus lanatus</i>)
		Like above but spikelets noticeably awned. Stem hairless but nodes with dense hairs.	Creeping Soft-grass (<i>Holcus mollis</i>)
	Leaves spear-like, hairless and with equal veins. Inflorescence fine and feathery. Spikelets 1-flowered (<i>Agrostis</i>)	Ligule short, 0.5-2mm	Common Bent (<i>Agrostis capillaris</i>)
		Ligule long, 2-8mm	Creeping Bent (<i>Agrostis stolonifera</i>)
	Tall plants forming dense perennial tussocks.	Leaves ridged and barbed when stroked backwards. Long, ragged ligule. Big, feathery panicles.	Tufted Hair-grass (<i>Deschampsia cespitosa</i>)
		Leaves smooth; ligule short and rounded. Panicle small with wavy stem.	Wavy Hair-grass (<i>Avenella flexuosa</i>)
Inflorescence as above but spikelets awned or with a pointed tip.	Leaves 1-5mm. Sheath hairy, tubular, fused along most of length.	Red Fescue (<i>Festuca rubra</i>)	

¹Obviously a *Poa* but with flattened stems and blue-green leaves? Growing in a dry patch? Try *Poa compressa*.

Like *Poa* but with denser flowerheads and florets not clustered at the end of the branchlets? Try *Polypogon viridis*.

Leaves needle-like, very thin (<i>Festuca</i>)	Leaves very narrow (0.6-1.4mm), leaf on flower stem needle-like. Sheath rounded and hairless.	Sheep's-fescue (<i>Festuca ovina</i>)	² Plenty of other grasses have 'oaty' florets. If you spot one with a yellow inflorescence and sheaths hair only at the base, it may be <i>Trisetum flavescens</i> .	
Inflorescence drooping to one side, usually with visible awns. Variable plants but often rather tall. Drooping leaves. ³	Leaves twisted, stem bent and with swollen nodes. Awns bent.	False Oat-grass (<i>Arthenatherum elatius</i>) ²		
	Spikelets elongate and parallel sided. Lemmas 9-36mm long (<i>Anisantha</i>)	Drooping heads and leaves. Lower sheath hairy; awn long (15-30mm. Large, ragged ligule.		
	Spikelets ovate to lanceolate, lemmas 5-11mm long (<i>Bromus</i>)	Leaves, stems, and fruits softly downy. Inflorescences erect with conical, chubby heads.	Barren Brome (<i>Anisantha sterilis</i>)	³ There are an awful lot of Bromes out there but many, thankfully, are rather scarce. <i>Bromopsis racemosa</i> is one of the commoner ones, usually in wooded areas. This is a tall plant with conspicuously hairy leaf sheaths.
Inflorescence a narrow spike of openly-spaced flowers. Spikelets alternating from one side to the other.	Large, tussock forming plants. Spikelets stalkless, with flattened side nearest the stem.	Leaves glaucous, grooved, and rough on the underside with serrated margins. Florets usually without awns.	Soft-brome (<i>Bromus hordeaceus</i>)	
		Lemmas with long awns up to 20mm; often wavy.	Common Couch (<i>Elymus repens</i>)	
	Flattened spikelets arranged edgeways to the central stem	No awns present	Bearded Couch (<i>Elymus caninus</i>)	
		Prominent awns present	Perennial Rye-grass (<i>Lolium perenne</i>)	
			Italian Rye-grass (<i>Lolium multiflorum</i>)	
Inflorescence a narrow spike, of dense, tightly clustered flowers	Flowers one sided, forming two parallel rows up stem, with central stem visible on one side	Crested Dog's-tail (<i>Cynosurus cristatus</i>)		
	Inflorescence cylindrical and densely packed so that individual florets are hard to distinguish	Lemmas with a single awn exceeding the glume	Straight stems, ligule rounded.	Meadow Foxtail (<i>Alopecurus pratensis</i>)
			'L-shaped' stems that grow parallel to the ground before turning upward. Ligule pointed.	Marsh Foxtail (<i>Alopecurus geniculatus</i>)
		Double-awned giving the appearance of devil horns	Lower leaves to 45cm long, inflorescence 6-15cm. Stem bends before flowerhead.	Timothy (<i>Phleum pratense</i>)
			Lower leaves to 12cm long. Inflorescence 1-6cm long. Much smaller overall.	Smaller Cat's-tail (<i>Phleum bertolonii</i>)