



## Grass tree Decline Fact Sheet

Grass trees (*Xanthorrhoea* species) come from most Australian states and territories with species evolved for different soil types usually in open grass lands or open woodlands in drier parts of the continent. Grass trees can go into decline if there drainage is not very good. They dislike having waterlogged roots and in fact resent any kind of root disturbance as they have a very special relationship with certain fungi that live in the ground – without healthy fungi you wont have healthy grass trees. For this reason it is very important when transplanting grass trees that at least a small amount of native soil it taken with the trees.

Excessive fertiliser can also cause damage to grass trees – especially phosphates so it is important not to use any high analysis fertilisers in and around grass trees. Even rich organic compost should be avoided.

Another problem that they can develop is a disease called Anthracnose. Symptoms are first visible as black flecks in the leaf tissue. These flecks develop to encompass the entire leaf and will spread to the rest of the crown. I think these plants here are infected with this fungal disease. Apply Mancozeb to protect leaves from further infection. However, if the disease has progressed too far, control may be ineffective.



One sure way to tell if the plant will survive is take a hold of some remaining green leaves and pull – if they come away readily then the chances of survival are almost zero.

Another problem that can cause grass tree decline is bardy bardy grubs or larvae of various beetles that get in the heart of the plant and eat out all the new growth (see image below). Sadly if the problem goes this far then it is unlikely that the grass tree can be saved.



### **Will fire work?**

One treatment that might work in cases where the leaves are still ok is to burn the old leaves. The WA DPI reckons this often stimulates new growth which allows the plant to come back from environmental stress like too much water. The idea is to set fire to the older dry foliage and wait for a few months to see if the plant will bounce back.



***Grass tree showing some decline in older foliage (image Simmons family)***

Some information and the first 2 images were adapted from [http://www.agric.wa.gov.au/objtwr/imported\\_assets/content/pw/gard/gn\\_pests\\_diseases\\_grasstrees.pdf](http://www.agric.wa.gov.au/objtwr/imported_assets/content/pw/gard/gn_pests_diseases_grasstrees.pdf)

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