PLANT FACT SHEET

# *Setaria palmifolia* (J. Koenig) Stapf

**GENUS** *Setaria* **FAMILY** Poaceae

**COMMON NAMES** Short pitpit, Pleated pigeon-grass

## EDIBLE PARTS AND USES

**Edible parts:** Shoots, Seeds, Vegetable

The fattened shoots are eaten. They can be steamed, eaten raw or cooked with rice.
The seeds are used as a substitute for rice in times of shortage. They are boiled or roasted.

## DESCRIPTION

A grass with a broad leaf blade. A plant grows from 60 cm to one metre tall. It has a knotty rhizome or underground stem. The leaves are 2 to 8 cm wide, 30-40 cm long and folded along their length. The leaf blade is folded like a fan and is hairy. The plant forms a clump of shoots and is about 1 m high. The shoots are thickened near the end in cultivated types. The flower is a loose open grass flower. A range of different varieties occur. These have different amounts of red, green and white colouring on the leaf and also where the leaves wrap around the stem. The seeds are about 3 mm long and borne in large numbers on shoots at the ends of the stalks. Normally a plant produces a clump of shoots due to both suckers near the base and buds growing from the side of the short stem. There are several cultivated varieties.

## HABITAT

A tropical plant. They are common and widely distributed from Luzon to Palawan and Mindanao in the Philippines. It grows from near sea level up to about 2400 m. It can grow in shady places and suits wet climates. This grass occurs as a wild plant, insignificantly used for food in several countries. These include Taiwan, Philippines, Malaysia, Indonesia, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, and Hawaii. Sometimes either the shoots or seeds of this wild plant are used as a famine food reserve. In Papua New Guinea, and to a smaller extent in other places, this species reaches significance as a domesticated, cultivated food plant. A number of named cultivated varieties occur. In the Cairns Botanical Gardens. In Sichuan and Yunnan.

## PRODUCTION

### Cultivation

Wild plants grow from seed. Garden types grow from pieces of the shoots.
Plants are normally propagated by planting shoots. The young shoots are broken off the side of the plant. Shoots near the ground often have roots already growing on them so these shoots start growing more quickly. Portions of the stem can be planted because buds near the joints along the stem can produce new shoots. Wild plants are seed propagated. Cultivated types exist as fully domesticated plants independently of the weedy

grass. It needs a reasonably fertile soil and is often planted on steep sides and edges of gardens. Its optimum altitudinal range is 1200m to 2400m. It can tolerate light shade. Plant spacings of about 1 m apart are used. Harvesting commences about 5 months after planting and may continue for up to 2 years.

### Harvesting and Seed Production

Harvesting commences about 5 months after planting and may continue for up to 2 years. A yield of 4.8 kg per plant in a year, of the stripped edible shoots has been recorded.

## NOTES

There are about 130 Setaria species. They are mainly in the tropics and subtropics. Demo

## PICTURES



Credit: Food Plants International (Bruce French)



Credit: Food Plants International (Bruce French)



Credit: Food Plants International (Bruce French)



Credit: Food Plants International (Bruce French)

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