

Plant of the Month - January

by Allan Carr

Murdannia graminea

Grass Lily/ Slug Herb

Pronunciation: mer-DAN-ee-a gram-in-EE-a

COMMELINACEAE

Derivation: *Murdannia*, after Murdan Ali, collector and keeper of the herbarium at Saharumpur Botanic Garden in northern India in the 1840s; *graminea*, from the Latin, *gramineus* – of grass, grassy.

Indians were widely used as plant collectors in the days of the East India company and the Raj, but they were not generally considered botanists, and the importance of their knowledge and their contribution to plant acquisition was seldom adequately acknowledged. However, the genus, *Murdannia* was established in honour of Murdan Ali by John Forbes Royle, Indian-born British botanist who was at the time superintendent of the East India Company's botanic garden in Saharanpur



Flower showing bearded filaments



Buds and flower emerging from the grasses

Murdannia is a genus of about 50 species distributed in tropical regions of the world with 3 species occurring in Australia.

Description: *M. graminea* is a small grass-like herb with thick, fleshy, white tuberous roots. It grows to 50 cm in grassy areas of open forests in Qld, NSW, NT and WA. Aboriginal people made use of the tubers as a food source from March to June.

Leaves to 200 mm x 10 mm form a loose basal rosette, are grass-like and usually sparsely hairy.

***Inflorescence** is a loose *panicle and the mauve flowers have 3 *orbicular petals to 8 mm across with bearded filaments. Flowering occurs mainly from November to May.

Fruits are *ovoid capsules to 8 mm x 4 mm with small, black pitted seeds

*inflorescence = the group or arrangement in which flowers are borne on a plant

*panicle = an arrangement in which the flowers are borne on branches

*orbicular = circular or nearly so

*ovoid = egg-shaped (in three dimensions)

Loose panicle with foraging ants

