

African daisy (*Senecio pterophorus*)

What is it?

African daisy, *Senecio pterophorus* is an erect perennial shrub 1–1.5 m high, with bright yellow flowers. It is not native to Australia.

What does it look like?

African daisy has typical 'daisy-like' yellow flower heads (1–20 cm across), with yellow petals radiating out from an orange centre. The leaves are leathery, up to 14 cm long and the lower leaves have distinctive teeth. The tops of the leaves are glossy-green and the lower leaves are white or grey and cobwebby.

African daisy can be easily confused with native *Senecio* (also known as Groundsel) species. However, the stems of African daisy have distinctive lacy wings which extend down the stem from where the leaf joins the stem. Native *senecios* have much smaller, simpler flower heads (don't look like typical daisies).

History

African daisy is native to high-rainfall areas of South Africa. It has been present on Kangaroo Island from at least the 1950s and was a significant weed as soldier settler blocks were cleared. As pastures were established on the cleared ground the weed became less abundant. African daisy reappears following disturbance events. For example, it became well established in a harvested forestry block around 2012, and following a significant rainfall event in 2013.

Following the 2019-20 Black Summer fires, African daisy has reappeared across many areas burnt in the fires. Given these widespread records, it is likely seed was present in the soil across the region, with germination triggered by the fire. The disturbance created ideal conditions for the plant to germinate free of competition from other plants.

Is it a problem?

African daisy is a pioneer plant, which invades sites that have undergone disturbance such as clearing, soil degradation or fire. It may become dominant and very conspicuous in the first years after disturbance. In these situations, it can out-compete other plants and become dominant and is sometimes a problem in agricultural areas but can be easily controlled through grazing or cultivation.



Above: African daisy has germinated widely across western Kangaroo Island since the 2019-20 bushfires.

Being a pioneer species, African daisy will not persist in high densities in the long-term. If left undisturbed, the plant gradually thins out and will not replace itself.

How is it spread?

African daisy reproduces by seed, with around 50,000 seeds produced per plant. Seeds mainly fall close to the parent plant. Some seeds can be transported long distance by wind or through movement of water, animals, vehicles and contaminated soil and produce. Seed can remain viable in the soil for over 100 years, so even with good management, seed may sit dormant in the soil for many decades until the next disturbance event triggers germination.

How do we control it?

African daisy infestations, while appearing highly invasive, do not persist for any length of time.

Isolated plants or very small infestations should be controlled to stop the further spread by:

- hand-weeding
- spot spraying with Glyphosate 360 g/L at 1ml/1 L of water + organosilicone penetrant at 1ml/1L
- 'crash' grazing (seedlings) using sheep in steep or rough country.

General farming practices such as maintaining a good ground cover and minimising excessive disturbance will help control African daisy.

Established infestations are often better left unmanaged, as the plant will eventually make the conditions unsuitable for itself to germinate and the plants will die out over time (5 to 10 years until this will happen). Broad scale control can make conditions more suitable for further germination as it opens up more bare ground.

The KI Landscapes Board has been controlling African daisy on roadsides around Bark Hut to minimise the spread.

Above right: A close up of the lacy wings extending down the stem of an African daisy. Below: African daisy infestation.



References:

Parson, W.T and Cuthbertson, E.G. 2001. *Noxious Weeds of Australia*, 2nd Ed, CSIRO Publishing.

Department for Water Land and Biodiversity Conservation. *Policy African Daisy*, Adelaide, viewed 28 May 2014 <http://www.pir.sa.gov.au>.



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