



# Khaki weed *(Alternanthera pungens)*

Declared weed in the Murraylands and Riverland region

Khaki weed is a perennial herb native to tropical and subtropical regions of Central and South America. This summer growing weed prefers warm temperatures, and with high rainfall or irrigation, it can establish in most areas across the Murraylands and Riverland region.

A creeping weed, it establishes quickly with a deep tap root that can see it through long periods of drought. It produces large amounts of prickly burrs which can remain viable for more than five years.

## Description

- stems are prostrate and hairy
- leaves broad ovate in opposite pairs
- round clusters of tiny flowers along the upper stem
- pale spikey bracts form a burr around seeds about 1cm long.

## Invasiveness

Khaki weed has high seed production. The seed is carried in prickly burrs that attach to livestock, animals, clothing, machinery and vehicle tyres. Seeds may also spread by water and as a contaminant in wool, hay and grain.

This weed colonises bare or disturbed areas, especially where there is heavy foot-traffic and occasionally establishes in unsown dryland pastures or bare ground that receives irrigation or extra runoff.

## Control

Small infestations can be successfully controlled by manual removal, ensuring the entire tap root is removed, or by spot treating with herbicide.

The plants, and any seeds that have formed must be disposed of by burning. Larger infestations can be sprayed with an appropriate herbicide.

Cultivation can be an effective control technique if it is deep enough to destroy the tap root, but may also spread root fragments which produce new plants requiring follow-up treatments. Competition is also an effective control method, encouraging the growth of desirable ground covers or pastures will aid in reducing infestation size.

## Impact

The major problems currently caused by khaki weed are due to its spiny burrs. It establishes in parks, lawns and ovals, especially if these are watered in summer, and reduces the area's amenity value.

The burrs cause damage to the feet and mouths of stock, they are recorded as a vegetable fault in wool, and have been associated with dermatitis in humans.

Khaki weed is a competitor in pasture and has the potential to become a more significant weed under irrigation than in dryland permanent pasture. It is suspected of poisoning livestock and causing a skin ailment in cattle.

**For more information or to report a sighting, please contact the Murraylands and Riverland Landscape Board.**

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