Creeping knapweed

Creeping knapweed (*Acroptilon repens*) is a competitive perennial pest plant which can reduce cereal crop yields by 75%. Root fragments broken off during cultivation is the primary method of spread.

What does it look like?

A perennial erect thistle-like herb up to 1m high, it is covered with dense soft greyish hair on leaves. The stems are erect, thin, stiff, branched, 45-90cm tall, and when young, are covered with soft, short, grey hair.

The urn-shaped, solitary flower heads occur in spring to autumn. They are purple, lilac or pink florets that turn straw coloured at maturity. The flowers are 1-1.5cm long and enclosed in thistle-like heads 5-9mm long, occurring at the ends of branches.

Seedlings form rosettes in spring, develop a deep root system, and flower the following summer. The extensive root system can extend more than 7 metres below the soil surface and the horizontal roots have buds which can give rise to new aerial growth. The roots are easily recognisable by their black or dark brown colour; older roots are scaly and black.

What is its impact?

It typically invades disturbed ground and cropping areas, forming large dense single-species stands. Once established creeping knapweed can dominate an area and significantly reduce crop yields and desirable pasture species. It also removes vital moisture and nutrients over the summer period.

It can be poisonous, but is generally avoided by grazing animals due to the bitter taste.

Creeping knapweed does not appear to reproduce extensively from seed, but just one plant may produce 1,200 seeds per year. Most dispersal from the parent plant occurs through the movement of root fragments during cultivation. It uses a combination of competitive adventitious shoots and allelopathic chemicals to inhibit surrounding plant growth and spread outward into previously un-infested areas.

What can you do?

Ensure purchases of fodder, produce, stock and soil are free of weed seeds. If stock are brought from infested areas they should be kept in a holding paddock for at least 14 days.

Any plants found should be destroyed before setting seed to prevent infestation. Continued vigilance on your property for new outbreaks is required to prevent the establishment of weeds.

The key to controlling any weed population is to prevent the plants from reproducing, this means preventing seed set or vegetative growth. Attempting to kill the plant at the end of its season will not help control an infestation.

Physical control:

Do not cultivate through infestations into clean ground, as this will spread root fragments creating new infestations. Creeping knapweed can be suppressed by maintaining a good competitive cover of perennial pasture species.

Prevention/ postponement of seed set can be achieved by hard grazing and mowing/slashing, but it will not kill creeping knapweed.

Chemical

For advice on chemical control techniques, contact the Northern and Yorke Landscape Board. Or please refer to the *Weed control handbook for declared plants in South Australia*. You can find it on PIRSA's website at: www.pir.sa.gov.au/biosecurity

What are your responsibilities?

Creeping knapweed is a declared plant under the *Landscape South Australia Act 2019*. Landholders must control the plant on their property. Sale or movement of plants or goods containing plants or plant parts is prohibited within the state.

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More information

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