White weeping broom

White weeping broom (*Ratama raetam*) was brought to Australia from the Mediterranean as an ornamental shrub. It was first recorded in South Australia in 1841. It has become naturalised in South Australia.

What does it look like?

It is a shrub that grows to about 3m tall and may reach 6m across. Plants are grey-green with slender, drooping branches.

Young plants are wispy with a single stem and strong taproot. The leaves which are very small and narrow (about 5mm long and 1mm wide), are quickly dropped and the plant remains leafless for most of the year. Flowers are 8–10mm long, white and pea-like, appearing close to the stems in clusters of 3–15.

White weeping broom reproduces from seed. The hairless grape-shaped seed pod (10–15mm diameter) contains one or two kidney-shaped seeds (6.5mm long) which may be yellow, green, brown or black in colour.

Stems of young plants are covered with long soft hairs but become hairless with age. Each plant produces hundreds of seed pods and up to thousands of seeds.

The seeds drop when the seed pods split open and can be spread by water. A hard seed coat renders most seeds dormant initially, but as the seed coat wears away germination can take place. Seeds remain viable in the soil for several years.

What is its impact?

White weeping broom is on the Australian Government National Alert List for Environmental Weeds, a list of 28 non-native plants that threaten biodiversity and cause environmental damage. Although only in the early stages of establishment, these weeds have the potential to seriously degrade Australia's ecosystems.

This species is possibly the most drought tolerant of the exotic brooms in Australia, making it a particular threat in dry regions and during drought years. Like many of the broom plants, it invades nutrient-poor to fertile, well-drained soils where it can fix nitrogen. It forms a scrub layer that can out-compete and shade out native plants.

Its current distribution ranges from scattered coastal sites from Streaky Bay to Southend and as far north in the agricultural zone as Peterborough. It is probably the least palatable of all the exotic broom plants.

What can you do?

Prevention and early intervention are the most cost-effective forms of weed control. It is important to identify existing sources of white weeping broom, such as garden specimens, and remove them before they invade natural ecosystems.

Physical removal is an option for isolated plants, especially if they have not seeded, although seedlings are hard to hand pull. Hand-pulled plants can be placed into large plastic bags and left in the sun and then thrown out. Seeds present on pulled plants should be cut from plants, collected in bags and placed in the rubbish. Take care not to spread seeds.

Once an area of white weeping broom has been treated, it will be necessary to monitor the treated area for many years and destroy new plants. Monitor the area in summer and remove any young plants that may have germinated.

Early detection and eradication of small infestations is important to prevent the spread of white weeping broom.

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

What are your responsibilities?

White weeping broom is a declared plant under the *Landscape South Australia Act 2019*. It must not be sold or traded in any way, including as a contaminant of anything. It must not be transported on a public road, including as a contaminant of anything.

More information

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