

Khaki Weed (*Alternanthera pungens*)

February 2018



Khaki Weed is a summer-growing perennial herb that produces spiny burrs.

It is a declared weed under the *Natural Resources Management Act 2004* (NRM Act).

Description

Khaki Weed is a creeping herb with a perennial woody taproot and annual above-ground growth.

The prostrate stems are reddish with soft, silky hairs. The stems grow to 60 cm long and can develop roots where stem nodes touch the soil.

The leaves are numerous and grow in opposite pairs of unequal size up to 4 cm long. The oval shaped leaves are green with red-purple veins. They have short stalks and are sparsely haired.

Flowers appear mainly in summer and autumn. The flowers are very small and occur in clusters in the axils of the leaves. The flowers are surrounded by sharply-pointed, chaff-coloured bracts.

The fruit is a prickly chaff-coloured burr about 1 cm long.

Seeds germinate in the spring but can also germinate in response to summer rain. The taproot and stems develop over spring and summer, with all above-ground growth dying off in late summer.

New growth is produced from the tap root in the following spring.

Impacts

Khaki Weed is a problematic pest plant in irrigated pastures. It competes well in established pastures and benefits from summer moisture.

The spiny burrs damage the feet and mouths of stock and degrade wool quality.

The plant may be poisonous to stock, but it is rarely eaten.

Khaki Weed is a problem in recreational parks and competes strongly with established lawns. The burrs cause injury to hands and feet. It is known to cause hay fever, asthma and dermatitis in some people.

Distribution

Khaki Weed is native to Central and South America.

It is a summer growing plant that prefers light soils, warm conditions and high soil moisture over spring and summer. Infestations are most likely where vehicles, stock, fodder and camping equipment provide sources of contamination.

In the Mount Lofty Ranges Khaki Weed has a limited distribution. Vulnerable areas include caravan parks, camp sites and picnic areas. There are a limited number of known infestations in the region and all are under a management program.





Close up of plant showing taproot
© Phil Reddy, Riverland Animal and Plant Control Board



Control methods

Good hygiene practices for the movement of stock, hay, seed, produce and machinery greatly reduce the possibility of new infestations.

A long-term control program is required to tackle Khaki Weed because of the abundant and persistent seeds and robust tap root. An effective control strategy will include mechanical and chemical control.

Cultivation, hoeing hand pulling can be effective if the crown and the taproot is removed. Care is required to avoid fragmenting the tap root from which new plants can grow.

Herbicides should be applied when the weeds are actively growing. Control treatments must be applied persistently, without missing a year, until the Khaki Weed infestation is eradicated.

Survey for plants throughout spring to late summer, to control any germination in response to summer rain.

For advice on chemical control techniques contact your nearest Natural Resources Centre. Please refer to the *Weed control handbook for declared plants in South Australia* for advice on chemical control. You can find it on Biosecurity SA's website at www.pir.sa.gov.au

Declarations

The following sections of the NRM Act apply to Khaki Weed in the Adelaide and Mount Lofty Ranges region:

- 175 (1) Cannot bring the plant into South Australia**
- 175 (2) Cannot transport the plant or anything carrying it**
- 177 (1) Cannot sell the plant**
- 177 (2) Cannot sell any produce / goods carrying the plant**
- 180 (1)(2)(3) Infestations must be reported to the NRM board**
- 182 (2) Landowner must control the plant on their land**
- 185 (1) NRM authority may recover costs for control of weeds on roadsides from adjoining landowners**

More information

Please contact your local Natural Resources Centre for further information, advice and assistance in controlling Khaki Weed.

Black Hill

115 Maryvale Road, Athelstone 5076
T: 08 8336 0901

Gawler

8 Adelaide Road, Gawler South 5118
T: 08 8115 4600

Willunga

5 Aldinga Road, Willunga 5172
T: 08 8550 3400

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