

African rue

African rue (*Peganum harmala*) is an introduced persistent perennial herb that significantly threatens semi-arid and marginal agricultural regions across South Australia. It establishes primarily in disturbed areas such as roadsides and degraded pastures, where it competes aggressively with native shrubs and grasses for soil moisture and nutrients.



What does it look like?

African rue is a deep-rooted perennial herb that grows to 0.8m. It has bright green, fleshy leaves divided into narrow segments. White flowers with five petals measure 2–4cm in diameter. It produces round capsules containing small brown seeds.

Where is it found?

African rue populations can be found in areas with full sun exposure and disturbed soil, such as around waterways, floodplains, and roadsides. It has been reported throughout the SA Arid Lands region.

It is a priority weed in the North Flinders, Gawler Ranges, North East Pastoral, Marree-Innaminka, Kingoonya and Port Augusta-Quorn districts. In the Marla-Oodnadatta district it is listed as an alert weed.

African rue thrives in environments with a similar climate to its native range in northern Africa and the Middle East, so it has adapted well to the dry and harsh

conditions of South Australia's Outback.

What is its impact?

Highly unpalatable, African Rue is often toxic for livestock, primarily due to alkaloids in its seeds, which can cause poisoning if ingested. These alkaloids can affect an animal's nervous system, and may lead to tremors, seizures, or death if consumed in significant amounts.

African rue also threatens local ecosystems by aggressively outcompeting native plants and pasture species. As an early spring germinator, it rapidly outgrows and overshadows and releases chemicals into the soil that inhibit the growth of nearby plants. This combination of factors allows African rue to rapidly invade and dominate, displacing local flora and reducing biodiversity.

What is being done?

Efforts are being made to control its spread in the SA Arid Lands region. African rue has a deep and extensive root

system, which makes it difficult to eradicate. The root system helps the plant survive during drought and it will re-sprout even after above-ground vegetation is removed.

The large quantity of seeds produced contributes to its rapid spread and persistence. While impacts in South Australia are currently localised, the plant has the potential to expand significantly, particularly in arid or semi-arid regions.

Its ability to adapt to dry conditions and its resilience make it a serious threat to both agricultural land and natural ecosystems if not carefully controlled.

What can you do?

Early detection and removal of small infestations is crucial for effective control of African rue and helps prevent further spread causing significant damage. Manual removal is particularly difficult due to the plants deep and extensive root system, which allows it to regrow after above-ground parts are removed.

Localised **herbicide application** can be effective, especially during the early flowering phase when the plant is more susceptible to treatment, but it remains difficult. Repeated applications are often necessary, as the plant can regenerate after treatment.

While soil-active herbicides may suppress regrowth, they carry the risk of damaging desirable species and disturbing the ecosystem.

It is important to avoid soil disturbance in infested areas, as this can inadvertently spread seeds and encourage new growth.

To achieve the best results and avoid off target damage, it's crucial to follow the guidelines and recommendations outlined in the [Weed Control Handbook for Declared Plants in South Australia](#), which offers comprehensive advice on herbicide use and integrated weed management strategies. Hard copies of this publication can be ordered from the SAAL office.



What is the board's role in control?

African rue is a declared weed under the *Landscape South Australia Act 2019*. Movement or sale of this plant or goods contaminated by it is prohibited.

Landscape Boards are responsible for managing high-priority infestations on public land and overseeing road reserve areas, where the plant can spread quickly due to transportation and human activity.

What is the responsibility of landholders?

In the SA Arid Lands region, landowners must notify the SA Arid Lands Landscape Board of infestations and control them where required. Movement of contaminated produce is restricted under regulation.

The SA Arid Lands Landscape Board can provide identification and control advice for your property.

More information

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www.landscape.sa.gov.au/saal