

Alligator Weed

What is it?

Alligator Weed is a summer growing perennial that can grow as an aquatic or a terrestrial plant.

In aquatic situations it can form floating mats of interwoven hollow stems that may be free floating or attached to the banks of waterways (fig. 1).

In terrestrial situations the plant may not be as vigorous (fig. 2).

What does it look like?

The main distinguishing features are:

- Leaves are lanceolate (spear shape) in opposite pairs along the stem, up to 100mm long and 20mm wide.
- Stems are hollow, with nodes spaced at regular intervals.
- Flowers are formed at the end of short stems, they are white and papery (fig. 3).
- Seeds produced are not viable.
- In aquatic situations roots are formed at the nodes and trail in the water or they may grow into the banks or substrate.

Terrestrial plants modify stems to produce thickened roots. These may extend more than 50cm below ground. The distance between nodes will decrease dramatically, and the hollow stem will be less noticeable (fig. 4)



fig. 1



fig. 2



fig. 3



fig. 4

Alligator Weed

Alternanthera philoxeroides

A category W1 Noxious plant in most of NSW (this requires landholders to notify Councils if infestations are discovered). It is a W1 or W3 (the plant must be prevented from spreading and numbers reduced) in Port Stephens.

Alligator Weed

How is it spread?

Alligator Weed does not produce viable seed. Propagation is by vegetative means where pieces of the parent plant are broken off and take root.

A common method of spread is by machinery, via excavators, backhoes and tractors that have worked in infested areas and have not been washed down before transport (fig. 5).

The transport of fragments in spoil from drain excavation (fig. 6) is also a common way of new infestations beginning. Accidental transport by boats and other recreational craft can also occur.

Alligator Weed is an extremely aggressive plant. Once established it will quickly become the dominant specie. In aquatic situations it can form large floating mats that will increase sedimentation, decrease the oxygen content of the water, and reduce native species through competition. Terrestrial infestations are not as vigorous but over time will become dominant.

Recent information indicates that Alligator Weed can cause conditions such as photosensitisation in cattle that continually graze on this plant.

Control Measures

Once established, Alligator Weed is very difficult to control, with 3 to 4 herbicide applications required per season. Biological control agents have been released for aquatic infestations; these can provide some reduction in plant mass but do not reduce the number of plants.

Disclaimer

The information contained in this document is based on knowledge and understanding at the time of writing (January 2004). Users are reminded of the need to ensure that any product purchased for the control of Alligator Weed is registered for that purpose. The author cannot take responsibility for any changes, or modifications, that are made to product registration or requirements that may occur after January 2004.

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fig. 5



fig. 6

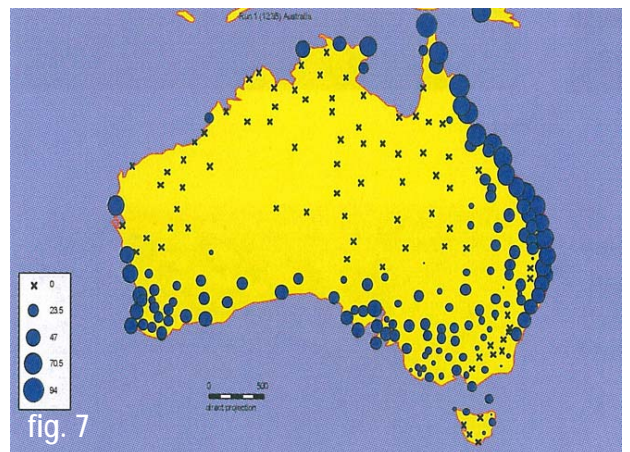


fig. 7: Potential range of Alligator Weed in Australia as predicted using the Climex model (CSIRO entomology)

The use of herbicides on or near water is also covered under various acts that are administered by the Environment Protection Authority. You should contact the nearest regional office and request information on the requirements before proceeding with herbicide applications.