

WEED WATCH

Leucaena

Leucaena leucocephala, commonly known as leucaena, lead tree or coffee bush, is a tropical tree native to Mexico and Central America where it is used for purposes such as firewood and livestock feed. Leucaena is an erect shrub or small tree 2-10 m tall with evergreen bipinnate leaves and small cream-white flowers arranged in globe-like heads and flat brown fruiting pods (9-23 cm) that contain many brown seeds. Flowering and seed production can be continuous throughout the year. Leucaena also has the ability to sucker vegetatively year-round. This species has been nominated as one of the "World's Worst" 100 plant invaders.

Leucaena has been planted for fodder in many tropical areas of the world including Australia. It is an environmental weed of open habitats (mostly coastal and riverine) and disturbed or degraded sites. Leucaena has also been planted as an ornamental in many Pilbara gardens and public parks probably because it grows quickly and provides welcome shade. The tree can form dense thickets that are difficult to eradicate once established. In the Pilbara this weed is common on the fringe of most towns and alarmingly is spreading rapidly into natural bushland environments.

Leucaena infestations should be reported to your shire ranger, environmental staff, or land management staff at the local government or DEC office.



Photos: Russell Barrett

