

Visitors, please help us get rid of this weed



A harmful weed

There is a plant growing around this community called Parkinsonia – sometimes known as the Jerusalem thorn or jelly bean tree. Its botanical name is *Parkinsonia aculeata*.

It is a weed, which Australia has declared to be a weed of national significance. It is thought to be native to tropical America and Africa and was brought to Australia over 100 years ago – probably to provide shade from the sun and as ornamental hedges for gardens.

Since then it has spread and is now found across the northern parts of Australia, infesting over 800 000 hectares of land, mainly along watercourses.

Parkinsonia damages other plants near the river and can harm animal and bird habitat.

It reduces pasture and the capacity of the land to carry cattle and sheep; it makes it more difficult to muster; it restricts access to water by stock; and it can increase soil erosion.

Parkinsonia also grows in places sacred to the Aboriginal people.

On the Fortescue River, it occurs in many isolated pockets along the river length. There are concentrated outbreaks within the Ngurrawaana lease and downstream on the Yalleen pastoral lease.

We need to get rid of the Parkinsonia weed and we need your help.

There are other plants, mimosa (*Acacia farnesiana*) and mesquite (*Prosopis velutina*), which can look a bit like Parkinsonia. So make sure you spot the right one.

About Parkinsonia

Parkinsonia occurs throughout northern Australia.

It generally affects areas close to river banks and those subject to flooding, such as along the Fortescue River.

It is a hairless shrub or small tree, not more than 10 metres high, with green bark and sharp spines or thorns. When flowering, its flowers have five yellow petals on a long thin stalk. It can form dense, often impenetrable thorny thickets along watercourses.

The weed can spread when the seeds are carried, mainly by water, but also by humans, vehicles, animals and birds.

Parkinsonia affects the biological communities close to rivers and the habitat of native animal species. It also reduces the attractiveness of the natural bush.

The seeds are oval, about 15 mm long, carried in pods 5–10 cm long. They have a hard coating and can lay dormant for many years, germinating only when conditions are favourable. They float well, so they are easily distributed by flooding after heavy rain.

Once the seed germinates, the plant grows quickly – flowering by its second or third season. Under favourable conditions, mature plants will survive for up to 10 years.

Seedlings can die in drought conditions, but mature plants will generally survive.

Parkinsonia favours clay soils but can germinate and survive in a range of soil types. A single tree can produce more than 2000 seeds when it flowers, either depositing them nearby or downstream after flooding.

Cattle generally do not graze on Parkinsonia, but camels like the seed pods and can help reduce infestation by trampling on juvenile plants and killing them.

What we are doing to get rid of it

We are treating the larger, thicker, impenetrable infestations first. Then, we are treating other outbreaks that we can reach easily.

We are treating the weed upstream because the seeds float and can be spread by flooding in the wet season. For this reason, we are concentrating on water catchment areas.

We are fencing areas around the river to keep out livestock and non-native animals.

Controlled burning is another way to wipe out small seedlings and seeds in shallow ground.

When we remove the weed, we are careful not to create the potential for erosion or re-infestation. We will continue to treat some areas for several years.

We are consulting with the Aboriginal community to make sure that we do not disturb sites of cultural significance.

Our aim is to control infestations and eradicate all mature Parkinsonia plants on the Fortescue River in the next 10 years.

What you can do

You can help to prevent the spread of Parkinsonia.

When you drive, please keep to established roads and tracks. If you 'bush bash' you can pick up the seeds on your vehicles and spread them.

If you are walking in the bush or areas where Parkinsonia is established, before you leave the area, make sure that you check your shoes and clothes for any seeds you might have picked up.

Where you spot infestations of Parkinsonia, please tell us by ringing the Department of Water on 08 9144 2000 or by calling in at our office.

Further information

For more information about Parkinsonia in the Pilbara, please contact

The Department of Water
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