

Agriculture Protection Board
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COMMON SENSITIVE PLANT



1. Foliage showing the effect of touch. 2. Flowers and fruit. 3. Branch showing thorns. 4. Seedling.

COMMON SENSITIVE PLANT

Common sensitive plant (*Mimosa pudica*) is a native of tropical America. The plant has spread throughout the humid tropics, of Africa, south-east Asia and Australia.

It is sometimes grown as a garden plant, mainly for its curiosity value; the leaflets fold together in pairs at the slightest touch. It has rapidly spread around the world as an ornamental plant and garden specimens have escaped to establish weed populations in nearly 40 countries. It is a major weed of maize in Malaysia and plantation crops such as sugar cane in Indonesia and Queensland. Unless prevented it could spread to the Kimberleys of W.A.

Ecology

Sensitive plant is a legume with the ability to fix nitrogen from the air.

It is tolerant of shade and can invade disturbed ground beneath crops.

It spreads mainly by the seeds. These have stiff bristles which enable it to stick to man and animals. A large percentage of the seeds are hard and do not germinate for some years. Some remain viable in the soil for many years.

Significance

It is a low wiry bush with sharp prickles. These restrict grazing and make hand weeding difficult and painful. It has been suspected of poisoning cattle, especially when fed on cut and dried stems. However it is a weed mainly because it competes with tropical crops.

Appearance

Sensitive plant is a low sprawling bush with a woody stem which is covered with sharp thorns. It bears numerous purple-pink flowers on

short stalks arising from the leaf forks. The leaves consist of 20-30 leaflets, arranged in pairs or groups of three. Seeds form in 2-3 cm long pods which occur in tight bunches. Each is covered in stiff bristles round the edge and breaks up into single seeded segments for dispersion. Sensitive plant has not yet been found in W.A. However, it is a declared plant because of its potential to cause damage to tropical agriculture. It may not legally be brought into the north of the state or grown there.

Anyone seeing what might be sensitive plant should contact the Agriculture Protection Board, Jarrah Road, South Perth, W.A., 6151, telephone (09) 367 0111 or any country office of the Department of Agriculture, or the APB.