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Agriculture Protection Board  
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# MESQUITE



**M**esquite is a serious weed in the north-west pastoral areas of Western Australia.

Mesquite is an aggressive competitor with rangeland plants. It forms dense thickets which shade out other vegetation, interfere with stock mustering and block access to watering places. It has sharp spines which injure animals and puncture vehicle tyres.

Mesquite is a native of southern USA, where it has become a major

1 Mesquite flowers 2 Leaves and spines  
3 Mesquite tree 4 Mesquite seed pods  
5 *Acacia farnesiana* flowers and seed pods.

weed.

Mesquite trees were planted on many north-west stations in the 1920's for shade and ornamental purposes and also for its nutritious pods. These plantings were initially a spineless variety, which showed little tendency to spread. The trees reverted to types with spines within a few years. A wet year in 1945 appeared to trigger

off an explosive spread of Mesquite. It has continued to spread in favourable seasons, covering many square kilometres of the most valuable river front grazing land. Mesquite is a declared plant (noxious weed) in Western Australia.

**Description:**

Mesquite is a perennial plant ranging in size from a shrub about 1 metre high to a tree 15 metres or more in height. Mesquite is a legume

(continued overleaf)

# MESQUITE

*(continued)*

belonging to the same group of plants as the wattles. The leaves are dark green and divided into numerous small leaflets. The wood is hard and reddish brown with an outside layer of yellow sapwood. The twigs are smooth barked, armed with straight spines which vary in size, but may reach a length of 10 cm.

Flowering begins in April and can continue through to September.

Small greenish yellow flowers are borne near the ends of the branches, in cylindrical clusters 5 to 8 cm long. The pods are 10 to 20 cm long, straw-coloured when ripe and containing 10 to 20 hard seeds. Seed production

is variable but even in seasons of sparse seeding, some plants may produce a heavy crop of pods.

Mesquite seed can remain dormant for many years. Seeds were found to be viable after 44 years' storage in the W.A. Herbarium. Mesquite is spread only by seed. Seeds are transported by flood waters and by animals such as cattle, kangaroos and emus. Some of the seed passes through the animal without being digested; in fact, this may stimulate germination.

Seedling Mesquite trees are often confused with the native shrub, *Acacia farnesciana*, commonly known as Prickly Acacia or Mindigarra. Two features enable Mesquite and *A.farnesciana* to be differentiated. Firstly, the branchlets

of *A.farnesciana* have small, grey, wart-like lumps, while Mesquite branchlets are smooth. Secondly the flowers and seed pods of *A.farnesciana* differ from those of Mesquite. The yellow flowers of *A.farnesciana* are circular, about 8 mm in diameter. *A.farnesciana* seeds are produced in dark brown woody seed pods which contain only one or two seeds.

Urgent action is essential to eradicate isolated patches of Mesquite to prevent the weed getting established in new areas.

***Suspect plants should be reported to the Agriculture Protection Board, Telephone Perth 367 0111, or any country officer of the Agriculture Protection Board or Department of Agriculture.***