

Agriculture Protection Board
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MEXICAN POPPY

Mexican poppy is a troublesome weed in Western Australia. It is widely distributed in the pastoral areas, mainly along river systems, moist flats and sand dunes. It is also present in some agricultural areas. Mexican poppy is poisonous to stock, but few deaths occur under field conditions because the spiny plant is not readily eaten. Some stock have died after eating contaminated hay or chaff. In agricultural areas, Mexican poppy can compete vigorously with crops and, to a lesser extent, with pastures. The seeds of Mexican



1 Mexican poppy seed pods showing seeds 2 Mexican poppy 3 Flowers

poppy could be harvested with a wheat crop, thus contaminating the grain. Mexican poppy infested grain is unsuitable for milling or stock feed. Mexican poppy is, as its name suggests, a native of Mexico; its range extending northwards to Texas and southwards to central America. Mexican poppy is a declared plant (noxious weed) in Western Australia. **Description:** Mexican poppy is an annual plant up to 1 metre in

height. It is a member of the poppy family, although prior to flowering it has the appearance of a thistle. The spiny rod-shaped stems are whitish in colour. When broken, the stem exudes a milky sap, which is bitter and makes the plant unpalatable to stock. The leaves, which grow up to 20 cm long are silvery green with white veining and deep regular lobes. The leaf margins are toothed and prickly. The underside of the leaf is smooth while the upper surface has a few prickles. The leaves are stalkless and clasp onto the plant's stem. Mexican poppy flowers from October to November. The poppy-like flowers
(continued overleaf)

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(continued)

are light yellow or cream and about 6 cm across. The flowers develop into a prickly fruit about 2.5 cm

long. These fruit contain numerous seeds. Mexican poppy only reproduces from seed and these are oval-shaped, blackish brown, about 1.5 mm long with a pitted seed coat and a ridge along one side. The seed can stay dormant for many years, making control difficult.

Mexican poppy is spread mainly by stock, farm implements, vehicles, water and in wool, hay, chaff and grain. Its use as a garden plant contributes to its spread. Prompt action is required to eradicate isolated patches of Mexican poppy to prevent the weed

getting established in new areas of Western Australia. *For information on Mexican poppy control contact the Agriculture Protection Board, telephone Perth 367 0111 or any country office of the Agriculture Protection Board or Department of Agriculture.*