

Agriculture Protection Board  
Advisory Leaflet No. 61  
May 1980  
Agdex No. 647  
CP 7257/3/80 — 10m

# St. JOHN'S WORT



1



2



3

1. Flower 2. Heavy infestation 3. Leaves showing oil glands.

(Continued overleaf)

# St. JOHN'S WORT

**S**T. JOHN'S WORT (*Hypericum perforatum* L. var *angustifolia*) is also known as Klamath weed or Goatweed in the USA. It originated in Europe and Western Asia, but has since spread to become a major weed in California, South Africa, New South Wales, and Victoria. Limited outbreaks have occurred in some high rainfall districts of Western Australia. But other south west areas are at risk from this weed. St. John's wort is a declared plant (noxious weed) throughout Western Australia.

St. John's wort can overrun grazing land, particularly when pastures get denuded. The leaves of St. John's wort contain a toxin which causes photosensitization amongst white faced stock. The plant also affects animals' nervous systems, causing unthriftiness and sometimes death.

## **Ecology:**

St. John's wort is a perennial plant

which reproduces from seed and from creeping underground rhizomes. Seeds germinate in either spring or autumn. The plants do not flower in their first year, but flower and seed prolifically in later years. Seeds may survive in the soil up to six years before germination. New infestations are formed from seed which has been spread in water or mud, on vehicles, stock and machinery and in hay, silage and chaff.

Existing infestations slowly spread as the rhizomes creep outwards. New plants also form from pieces of root spread by cultivating machinery.

## **Description:**

St. John's wort has two growth forms. In winter the stems are spindly and low growing with a dense mat of leaves. Erect woody stems are produced in spring. These are cylindrical and shiny, 0.6 to 1 m tall, branching near the top with two

opposite ridges running down them. The leaves are long and narrow, stalkless and arranged in opposite pairs. They bear translucent oil glands.

Flowering occurs during the summer. The flowers are up to 25 mm across with five bright yellow petals, which often have black dots on the edges. Numerous flowers are found together in clusters near the top of the stems. The seeds are light brown, bean shaped and 1 mm long. They are produced in large numbers in three cells inside a sticky capsule.

Urgent action is required to eradicate existing infestations and to prevent spread to new areas.

***Suspected St. John's wort plants should be reported to the Agriculture Protection Board.***

***Telephone Perth (09) 367 0111 or any country office of the Agriculture Protection Board or the Department of Agriculture.***