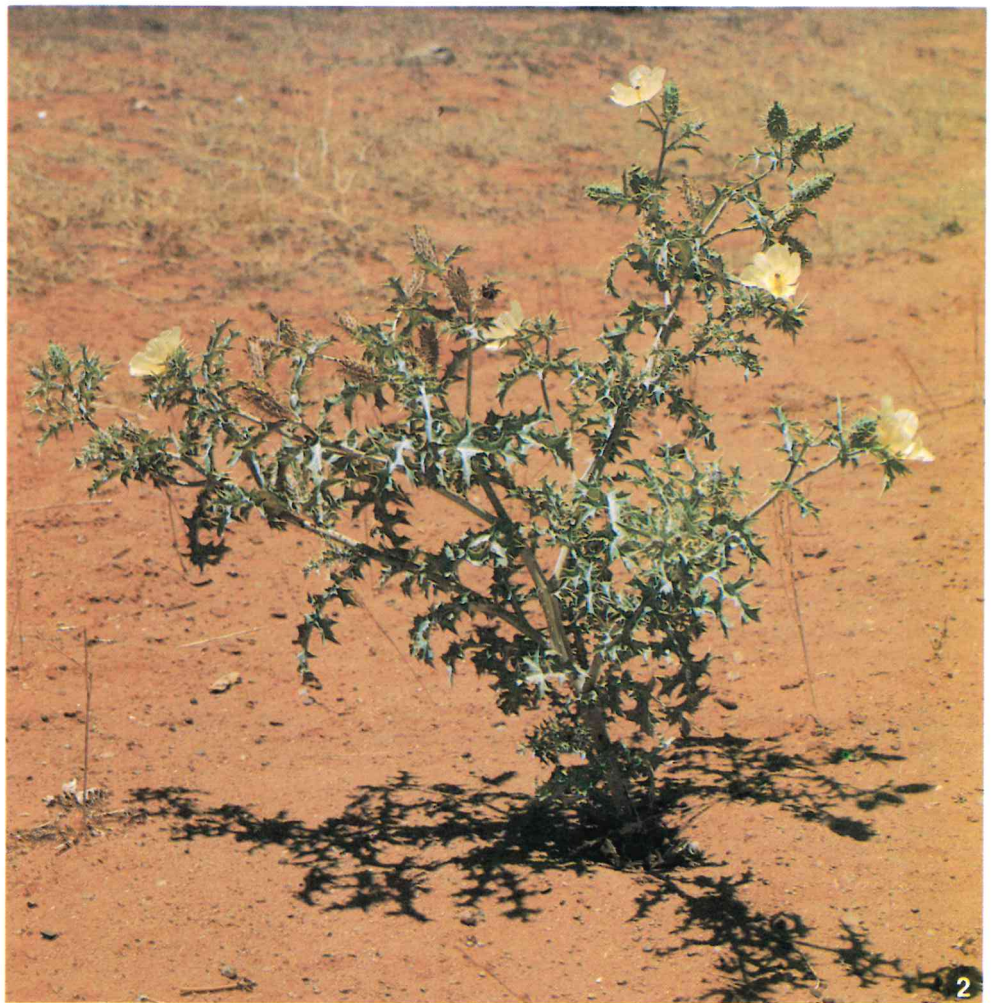


MEXICAN POPPY



1. Rosette
2. Mature plant
3. Flower and seed pods
4. Infestation



MEXICAN POPPY

Mexican poppy (*Argemone ochroleuca*) is a member of the poppy family and as its name suggests, is a native of Mexico; its range extending northwards to Texas and southwards to central America.

Mexican poppy is widely established as a weed in the tropics. It has been introduced to Queensland and New South Wales and has become a troublesome weed in parts of Western Australia. It is not yet fully established in all suitable sites in the state therefore it is a declared plant in WA.

In WA 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, but does not compete well with crops or well managed pastures. Another closely related species of Mexican poppy *Argemone mexicana* is found elsewhere in Australia.

Mexican poppy is poisonous to stock, but few deaths

occur because the plant is not readily eaten. This is due to the bitter sap which makes it unpalatable to stock. However some stock have died after eating contaminated hay or chaff and poultry after eating seeds. Mexican poppy seeds could be harvested with a wheat crop, thus contaminating the grain. However the seeds are much smaller than wheat grains and can easily be removed by seed cleaning. Mexican poppy infested grain is unsuitable for milling or stock feed.

DESCRIPTION

Mexican poppy grows up to one metre in height. It has typical poppy flowers, hollow stems and seed capsule. However prior to flowering it resembles a thistle because of its toothed and prickly leaf margins.

The plant is bluish-green in colour with waxy marbling to the leaves. The leaves, which grow up to 20 cm long are silvery green with

white veining and deep regular lobes. The upper surface of the leaf is smooth while the underside has a few prickles along the midribs. The stem leaves (in contrast to the rosette leaves) are stalkless and clasp onto the plant's stem. The stems are cylindrical, whitish in colour, and have scattered prickles. When broken, the stems exude a yellowish milky sap.

The flowers are about 6cm across. They have four light yellow or cream petals with a dark red three or six lobed stigma. After fertilization a prickly oblong seed capsule develops. This is up to 3.5cm in length with three to six openings at the top. The capsule contains up to 400 seeds.

A. mexicana differs from *A. ochroleuca* in having a greener appearance and bright yellow flowers.

The seeds are oval-shaped, blackish brown, about 1.5mm long with a pitted seed coat and a ridge along one side.

LIFE CYCLE

Mexican poppy is an annual plant. In the south west of W.A. it germinates in autumn and flowers from October to November. In other parts of the state its life cycle depends mainly on the availability of moisture.

ECOLOGY

Mexican poppy only reproduces from seed. The seed can stay dormant for many years, making control difficult. Seeds are carried by stock, farm implements, vehicles, water and in wool, hay, chaff and grain. Its use as a garden plant also 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 (09) 368 3333 or any country office of the Agriculture Protection Board or the Department of Agriculture.