

## RUBBER VINE



1. Mature plant
2. Infestation
3. Lilac flower variant
4. White flower variant
5. Seed pods



Photos: 1&2 Allan Tomley, 3 G. Harvey, 4 Frank Smith, 5 Jon Dodd

(Continued overleaf)



## RUBBER VINE

Rubber vine (*Cryptostegia grandiflora*) is a member of the milkweed family. This fast-growing climbing plant is an important weed in northern Queensland and shows signs of spreading to Western Australia.

It originated in Madagascar and was formerly grown there and later in India to produce a poor quality rubber latex. More recently it has been cultivated as an ornamental plant because of its showy flowers and hardiness.

It was first recorded in Australia in 1875. It has since escaped from cultivation and become a weed. Most of the known infestations appear to have started from mining towns and other settlements. It has the makings of a serious weed in the Kimberley of Western Australia.

Because of its weed potential and the increase in

tourist traffic across the north of the country, rubber vine has been gazetted a declared plant (noxious weed) in Western Australia. It may not be imported into, or grown in the state and any plants present must be destroyed by the owner or occupier of land on which they are growing.

### Damage

Rubber vine is poisonous; it contains cardiac glucosides which interfere with heart operation. When eaten it also causes severe stomach and intestinal upset. Stock find it unpalatable but may eat it when feed is scarce and dry. Its rampant growth may restrict their access to water points. It damages the environment by smothering and pulling down riverside vegetation.

### Description

Rubber vine is a woody climbing plant. Its rampant growth permits it to climb

over trees up to 15 metres high. In the open it forms loose many-stemmed shrubs from one to two metres high.

It has fleshy, shiny, dark green leaves ranging from six to 10cm long and up to five centimetres broad. They are arranged in pairs opposite each other on long smooth succulent stems. When broken the stems exude a milky sap.

Rubber vine has large, showy, white to lilac flowers with a broad funnel-shaped tube and five spreading lobes. The tubular portion is sometimes tinged with red. Flowers are about five cm across.

Seeds form in large pods about 15cm long. Pods are often found in pairs, joined at the bases to form an angled wing-like shape on a short stalk. The pods distinguish it from similar native plants. Each pod

contains numerous seeds, each with a tuft of long white silky hairs at one end.

### Ecology

Rubber vine may be found on a wide range of soils in the tropics. It is usually found in wooded areas or along watercourses where trees provide support for its vines and the good water supply allows vigorous growth.

It is spread by seeds. These have long silky hairs which allow it to be carried short distances by wind. Seeds may be carried longer distances by vehicles and on stock or machinery.

**For further information on rubber vine contact the Agriculture Protection Board, Baron-Hay Court, South Perth 6151, telephone (09) 368 3472 or the nearest country office of the APB or Department of Agriculture.**