

WILD GARLIC



Photo: courtesy Dr Charles Lamp and Frank Collet

(Continued overleaf)

WILD GARLIC

Wild garlic (*Allium vineale*), also known as crow garlic, wild onion and field garlic, is a serious weed of crops and pastures. It originated in Europe, North Africa and Asia Minor and has become a problem weed in eastern and south-eastern USA, New Zealand, New South Wales and South Australia.

It taints milk within a few minutes of cattle beginning to graze the weed. It may also taint meat. The bulbils are similar in size to wheat grains and virtually impossible to remove by seed cleaning. They have a strong odour and interfere with milling by clogging the rollers as well as tainting the flour. The Australian Wheat Board has a nil tolerance of wild garlic bulbils.

Wild garlic also competes with crops and pastures. It is difficult to control and almost impossible to eradicate once it has become established.

Ecology

Wild garlic is a perennial plant which reproduces from bulbs, bulbils and sometimes seeds. Bulbs emerge in the autumn giving rise to plants which flower during their first year. Seeds and bulbils germinate in autumn also, but produce only bulbils in spring. These develop into plants which flower in the second year.

Two forms of bulbs are produced with soft and hard shells respectively; soft-shelled bulbs and the seeds and bulbils usually germinate within one year, while hard-shelled bulbs may remain dormant in the soil for up to six years.

Up to six new bulbs are formed at the base of the plant around the parent bulb. Some have a soft white shell and others are brown and hard. Bulbs may be spread in mud attached to vehicles or

animals. Bulbils are spread in the same way and also as a contaminant of cereal seeds. Seeds may also be spread in the gut of animals.

Bulbils sometimes germinate in the head without breaking off from the parent plant.

Description

Wild garlic is an erect herb with a strong garlic odour. It grows up to one metre high. The stems are erect, cylindrical and unbranched. They are almost filled with pith and are sheathed part of the way up the plant.

Leaves are slender, about 1.5mm broad and emerge from the lower part of the stem. They are hollow and cylindrical except for a channel on one side.

The flowers are pale pinkish to greenish white. They are formed on short stalks in clusters during late spring. Flower heads are about

25mm in diameter. Many contain no seeds. Sometimes some or all of the flowers are replaced by bulbils.

Seeds are quite rare. They are black, about 3mm long and flattened on one side.

Bulbils are oval, smooth and shiny. They are about 6mm in diameter. Wild garlic roots are shallow and fibrous.

It is vital to identify wild garlic infestations if they occur in W.A., so they may be eradicated before spreading to large areas.

For advice on wild garlic identification and control contact the Agriculture Protection Board, Baron-Hay Court, South Perth, telephone (09) 368 3472 or any local office of the APB or the Department of Agriculture.