

APB INFONOTE

ALLIGATOR WEED

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1. Alligator weed infestation
(Photo: NSW Dept Water Resources)
2. Flower
(Photo: GR Sainty)
3. Leaves, stolons and flower
(Photo: GR Sainty)

ALLIGATOR WEED

What you should know about alligator weed

Alligator weed (*Alternanthera philoxeroides*) is a native of tropical and sub-tropical South America. From there it spread to North America and many parts of the tropics, causing serious problems in bodies of fresh water. It was introduced to New South Wales about 50

years ago. It is a potentially troublesome water weed in Western Australia and has therefore been gazetted a declared plant (noxious weed) in the state. It cannot be imported into WA or kept here, and all plants present must be destroyed.

Why alligator weed matters to you

Alligator weed forms large mats of interwoven stems. It can obstruct navigation and water flow and invade adjoining wet or irrigated land. It is extremely difficult to eradicate.

Blocks rivers and invades wetlands

The mass of vegetation crowds out most native and crop plants, making it a serious weed in irrigation areas and swamps

What you should look for

- Alligator weed is found in rivers, lakes and wetlands.
- Leaves are hairless with conspicuous veins radiating from a central nerve.
- Leaves grow in opposite pairs, directly from joints (nodes) on the hollow, greenish-brown stems.
- Stolons (creeping stems) can reach 10 metres long.
- Stolons have fibrous roots that hang in the water or grow into the soil where the water is shallow.
- During summer, alligator weed produces white flowers in small groups, about 1 cm in diameter. They also arise from stem nodes.

Why alligator weed might succeed in WA

Alligator weed is a perennial aquatic plant that can also grow on swampy land. It forms dense floating or rooted mats up to one metre deep. It prefers static or slowly flowing fresh water with high nutrient levels, but will withstand brackish conditions. Alligator weed spreads by

stolons that grow outwards, forming new roots at the nodes. Short lengths of stem can break off and develop into a new plant. It forms seeds, but they do not appear to be viable in Australia, therefore spread is entirely by vegetative reproduction.

What you can do about it

Check out any water plant which could be alligator weed and dry and burn any plants you find.

Where to find out more

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