

APB INFONOTE

CALOTROPIS

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1. Mature plant
2. Infestation
3. Flowers of *Calotropis procera*
4. Flowers of *Calotropis gigantea*
5. Fruit
6. Seedling

Photos:
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3&4 Toni Lumsden

CALOTROPIS

What you should know about calotropis

Calotropis (*Calotropis procera*) is also commonly known as rubber bush, or cabbage tree. It is a member of the plant family Asclepiadaceae.

Calotropis and its relatives are native to the tropics of Asia and Africa. Two species were introduced to Australia either by accident with packing material or as ornamentals because of their attractive flowers.

A species closely related to the weed, *Calotropis gigantea*, is often cultivated in the Kimberleys as a garden shrub, but has shown no sign of spreading or becoming established as a weed. Unlike *C. procera*, it does not appear to set fruit in Australia and is propagated by cuttings.

Calotropis is a Declared Plant (noxious weed) in Western Australia north of the 26th parallel, except in the Kimberley.

Why calotropis matters to you

Calotropis has spread widely in the Kimberley region of Western Australia and may become a weed in the higher rainfall pastoral areas of the Northern Territory.

Calotropis invades overgrazed pastoral land, disturbed natural bush and grasslands, and land disturbed by road making. Damaged

plants produce numerous suckers from the base and along lateral roots.

It sometimes forms dense thickets on alluvial flats along rivers, substantially reducing grazing by competition for light and water.

Calotropis can be poisonous to stock and people.

What you should look for

Calotropis is a perennial shrub or small tree, growing up to 3 metres in height

- Leaves are 10 to 20 cm long broad and flat, oval in outline with a short pointed tip. The blade is thick and greenish-grey coloured.
- Flowers are small, scented and about 2.5 cm across. The petals are mainly white with a purple blotch at the tip. They form in groups of up to 15, near the ends of branches.

- The fruit is large and swollen, 7.5 to 10 cm long.

- Seeds are numerous, each with a parachute of silky hairs. They are contained within the fruit until it ripens,

- Stems of both calotropis species exude a white sap when broken.

- *C. gigantea* differs from *C. procera* in not producing seed and having mauve-pink flower petals. It is also generally larger, up to 4.5 metres high.
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Life history of calotropis

Calotropis is a perennial shrub that reproduces by seeds. It may also regenerate from broken stems moved by graders.

It begins flowering in August and continues through to October with the main flowering in September. Seeds are produced in the fruits

from September to November and the fruit ripen from November to February.

When ripe, the fruit burst and release the seeds which can be carried long distances by the wind. Seeds are also carried in floodwater and in mud attached to animals and vehicles.

What you can do about it

Destroy isolated patches of calotropis to prevent the weed from getting established in new areas. Elsewhere it is best managed by

pasture regeneration and controlled grazing after existing plants have been killed.

Where to find out more

For further information on calotropis, 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.
