

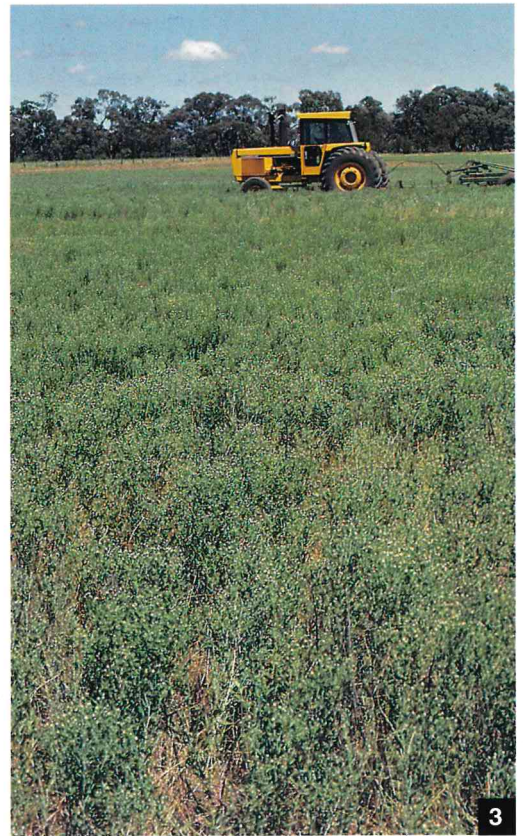
## CREEPING KNAPWEED



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1. *Mature plants*
2. *Flowers*
3. *Infestation*

Photos:  
1 & 3 Graeme Pritchard (Photo 3 from  
"Noxious Weeds of Australia" - Parsons  
& Cuthbertson)  
2 Bill Parsons



# CREEPING KNAPWEED

## What you should know about creeping knapweed

Creeping knapweed (*Acroptilon repens*) is also known as hardheads, hardhead thistle, blue weed and Russian knapweed.

### Threat to WA

It is a major problem weed in the Murray river irrigation area and the Victorian Mallee and is also found in South Australia and Queensland.

It originated in southern Russia and probably spread from there as an impurity in lucerne seed. It has become established as a serious weed in Canada, California and eastern Australia.

It has not yet been recorded in W.A. but it could flourish here if introduced. Because of this threat it should not be grown and any plants found should be destroyed.

## Why creeping knapweed matters to you

Creeping knapweed forms dense patches which shade out crops and pastures. Dryland crop yields may be reduced by up to 75 per cent and it is difficult to control in crops. Its seed imparts a bitter flavour to contaminated flour. It is also a major weed of

### Competitive, bitter-tasting poisonous weed

vineyards and orchards.

The plant may be poisonous to sheep if eaten in large amounts. Unlike most poisonous plants, creeping knapweed is freely grazed, but has little feed value.

## What you should look for

Creeping knapweed resembles a spine-free thistle. It has:

- Erect branched stem up to one metre tall. It is dark brown to black near the base.
- Leaves and stem slightly woolly in appearance.
- Leaves are grey-green, narrow and up to 7.5 cm long with irregular lobes. The lobes cut deeper into those leaves nearer the bottom of the stem.
- Thistle-like flower heads, usually purple but

sometimes pink or white. They are about 2.5 cm in diameter and form singly at the ends of branches.

- Seeds are wedge-shaped and about 5 mm long. They are smooth, greyish-white in colour with an attachment of short, stiff hairs.
- Seeds remain in the head at maturity – they are not shed, unlike most plants.
- Roots form a dense network with many buds from which new shoots arise.

## Why creeping knapweed might succeed in WA

Creeping knapweed is a perennial plant. It appears to prefer clay or clay-loam soils but occurs on most soil types.

- The weed's most important means of spreading is its extensive, creeping horizontal root system. It can regenerate new plants from root sections broken off and transported by farm vehicles and road-making machinery.
- It also reproduces from seeds that may be spread by water. They remain viable even after soaking for several months.
- Seeds have stiff, hooked hairs that help them stick to fur and fibres such as clothes,

### Spread by creeping roots and seed

animals and sacking.

- Seeds may also be a contaminant in pasture seeds.

Creeping knapweed seedlings do not easily become established. However, once established they quickly form a deep tap root, extending down to four or five metres over two years. The roots may persist for many years.

The plant is dormant during winter, growing in spring and flowering in summer. Flowering does not normally occur until the second summer. The above-ground parts of the plant die off after flowering.

## What you can do about it

Keep creeping knapweed out of WA.

It is important for agriculture that creeping knapweed is not allowed to become established in WA.

Take care to avoid bringing seeds into the state and check out any suspicious-looking plant.

## Where to find out more

For further information on creeping knapweed 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.