



Government
of South Australia

WEED IDENTIFICATION NOTES

ANIMAL AND PLANT CONTROL COMMISSION

KHAKI WEED



*Closeup of plant showing
taproot*



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Khaki weed, *Alternanthera pungens*, is a perennial groundcover herb introduced from South America. It forms carpets of sharp burrs that can injure people and animals. The creeping form of this plant allows it to out-compete desirable plants. It is important to keep khaki weed off clean properties or to recognise and destroy new infestations before they become established.

Distribution

Eyre Peninsula	- isolated plants
Northern pastoral	- few isolated plants
Northern ag districts / Yorke Peninsula	- small infestations near towns
Murray Mallee	- isolated patches
South East	- isolated patches in upper south east
Central region	- isolated outbreaks

Impacts

The burrs of khaki weed injure people and animals and contaminate wool. It is claimed to cause allergies in humans and may be poisonous to stock. It is a particular nuisance in amenity areas or lawns and to fruit pickers. The deep taproot allows this plant to regenerate and tolerate drought.

Recognition

Khaki weed is a prostrate creeping herb that is normally perennial but may grow as an annual. The root system consists of a deep, woody taproot with a blackish surface. Each root crown produces several reddish stems that spread to 60 cm along the ground; roots form from the stem nodes that contact the ground. Oval shaped green leaves are in pairs along the stem, ranging between 5 and 45 mm long. One large vein stands out on the underside of each leaf.

Flowers are very small, produced in clusters surrounded by spikey, straw-coloured bracts in the leaf axils. These bracts remain around the fruit to form a prickly, straw-coloured burr about 1 cm long. Seeds in the burrs are round, yellow and shiny, 1 to 2 mm long.

Biology

Khaki weed is a summer-growing perennial that prefers light soils, warm temperatures and plenty of moisture. It particularly favours areas like caravan parks that are watered in summer.

Khaki weed can reproduce from seed, roots and by the stem nodes taking root. Seeds germinate after spring or summer rain, develop a deep taproot and stems form during summer. Roots form at the stem nodes and produce new plants that thicken the ground cover. Flowering and seeding occurs in summer and autumn with aerial growth dying off before winter. New shoots appear from the crowns each spring.

Longer distance dispersal occurs when burrs attach to clothing, animals or machinery.

Further Information:

Parsons, W.T. & Cuthbertson, E.G. (2000). *Noxious Weeds of Australia*. 2nd ed. Inkata Press.

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For more advice on recognising and controlling khaki weed, contact your local Animal and Plant Control Board:



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