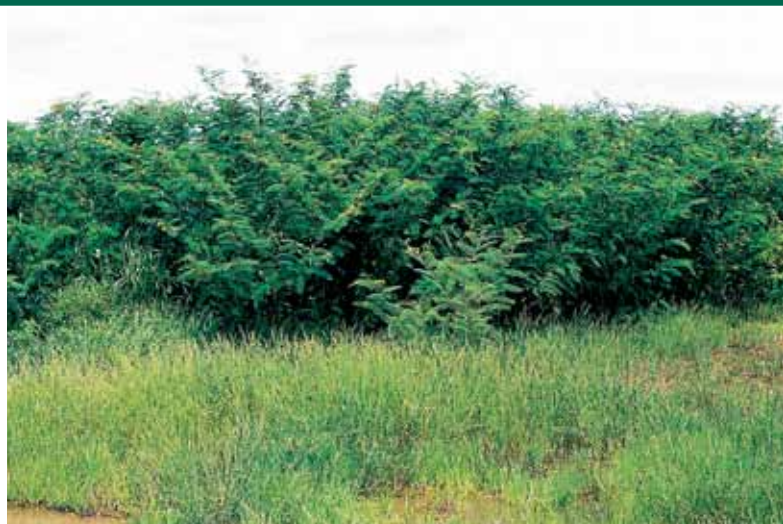


Mimosa pigra



Mimosa pigra forms dense, impenetrable thickets, 3–6 m high, establishing on waterways, flood plains and wetlands.

Accessibility to water for stock, irrigation and recreation purposes is affected. Pastures are smothered, reducing available grazing area and making stock mustering difficult.

Dense growth eliminates most other species and alters the natural habitat in conservation areas. In the Northern Territory, some 80 000 ha of floodplains have been covered by the plant.

M. pigra's invasiveness is due to its aggressive growth. Once seedlings are established, growth is rapid; one-year-old plants with a stem diameter of 2.5 cm often attain a diameter of 7 cm in the second year.

In experiments in the Northern Territory, regrowth from young plants severed at ground level reached a height of 2.5 m and covered an area of 6.3 m² within 12 weeks.

Declaration details

M. pigra is a Class 1 declared pest plant in Queensland and a Weed of National Significance (WONS). Class 1 pests established in Queensland are subject to eradication from the state. Landowners must take reasonable steps to keep land free of Class 1 pests. It is a serious offence to introduce, keep or supply a Class 1 pest without a permit issued by Biosecurity Queensland. Penalties of up to \$80 000 apply.



Description and general information

As a young plant, *M. pigra* grows as a single prickly stem. Mature plants tend to be a branched shrub with rose-like thorns. The plant can reach a height of up to 6 m with a branching taproot extending 1–2 m deep.

Leaves are green, feathery and fern-like, with the central leaf stalk being prickly and 20–25 cm long. Each leaf contains up to 16 opposite segments, each segment 5 cm long and divided into pairs of leaflets which fold up at nightfall or when touched or injured.

The flowers are round, fluffy, pink or mauve balls 1–2 cm across.

Each flower head produces a cluster of 1–30 seed pods which are 3–8 cm long and covered with dense hairs. The pods turn brown when mature and break into segments, which fall away from the pod leaving a skeletal outline. Each segment contains an oblong shaped seed 4–5 mm long and 2 mm wide.

Life cycle

In the Northern Territory, *M. pigra* germinates as flood waters recede in the dry season, or in the wet season between November and March.

The first flowers tend to appear 4–12 months after germination, with the main flowering period occurring between January and March, sometimes continuing longer if sufficient moisture is available.

Experience at the Peter Faust Dam site in Queensland has shown that flowering can occur in as little as two months after germination and podding as early as four months after germination.

Seeding occurs approximately three to six weeks after the flower bud is formed.

The seeds have an extremely hard, often impermeable seed coat. Some are able to germinate as soon as conditions permit, while others remain dormant for many years. In the Northern Territory seeds have remained dormant for up to 23 years.

Dispersal

The one-seeded hairy segment of the pods is easily spread by humans, animals and water.

The segments stick to the fur of animals and can pass unharmed through their digestive tract. Segments may become attached to people's hair, shoes and clothing. Vehicles, boats and machinery also transport seed either in mud or loose as a result of brushing up against plants.

The hairs also enable the pods to effectively float on water, enabling them to be easily spread downstream and onto floodplains adjacent to rivers.



Habitat and distribution

M. pigra is a native of tropical America, where it occurs in Mexico and Central and South America.

It has been introduced into a number of other tropical countries as an ornamental or a cover crop, where it is now a serious weed.

In Australia, the plant is found in the top end of the Northern Territory where it was introduced in the early 1890s. It is now one of the worst weeds of the top end, and has the potential to colonise all the wetlands of tropical Australia.

In February 2001, the first recorded infestation outside of the Northern Territory was confirmed at Peter Faust Dam, near Proserpine, Queensland. Biosecurity Queensland, SunWater, Whitsunday Regional Council, Mackay Whitsunday Natural Resource Management Group and the Australian Government are working together to eradicate this infestation.

No other infestations are known to exist in Australia outside of the Northern Territory.

M. pigra favours a wet–dry tropical climate, in areas with above 750 mm annual rainfall and higher temperatures. In areas with less than 750 mm of annual rainfall, it could still pose problems in wetlands and around dams and waterways.

M. pigra will establish in a range of soil types and is found in moist situations such as floodplains and river banks.

Control

Control of *M. pigra* is undertaken by Biosecurity Queensland. Please call 13 25 23 if you have seen this plant.

Further information

Further information is available from your local government office, or by contacting Biosecurity Queensland (call 13 25 23 or visit our website at www.biosecurity.qld.gov.au).