

Koster's curse

Clidemia hirta



Koster's curse is a quick-growing invasive plant that has the ability to form dense thickets, smothering native vegetation and causing major problems to primary industries. It forms dense thickets that can smother pasture and native vegetation in a similar manner to lantana. The berries produced are attractive to birds, which can assist the plant spread. It will invade disturbed areas, including the edges of clearings and stream-banks, along fence lines, paths and roadways.

Legal requirements

Koster's curse is a restricted invasive plant under the *Biosecurity Act 2014*. The Act requires that all sightings of Koster's curse plants must be reported to Biosecurity Queensland within 24 hours of being found.

By law, everyone has a general biosecurity obligation (GBO) to take all reasonable and practical steps to minimise the risk of spread of Koster's curse until they receive advice from an authorised officer. It must not be kept, moved, given away, sold, or released into the environment without a permit.

Description

Koster's curse is a bushy, perennial, evergreen shrub that can grow to a height of 5 m in moist, shady conditions. In harsh growing conditions it may appear as a weak and straggly small shrub.

Leaves are elliptical in shape with toothed margins. The leaf surface has a wrinkled, papery texture and five conspicuous longitudinal veins. Stiff, reddish-brown hairs cover the stems and leaves. Leaves are normally 8–10 cm long, are oppositely arranged and hairier on the underside.



Koster's curse produces clusters of 6–20 small, white flowers in the leaf forks. The flowers are 1–1.5 cm in diameter and produce red-purple to blue-black berries, each 4–5 mm in diameter. The berries are also hairy and turn dark purple when mature. Each berry contains up to 100 tiny seeds (0.5 mm).

Flowering and fruiting appears to occur all year, except at dry times.

Life cycle

Reproduction is by seed. Each Koster's curse plant has the potential to reproduce 1000 berries a year, which can generate over 700 000 seeds.

Seeds can persist in the soil for at least four years. Seedling establishment is very successful. Plants tolerate a range of environmental conditions and reach full maturity in less than twelve months.

Methods of spread

The most common method of dispersal of Koster's curse is from birds eating the berries. The fruit may also be spread by feral pigs, water and human intervention, such as in potting material and mud on machinery or vehicles.

Habitat and distribution

Koster's curse has a wide native range extending from southern Mexico south to Costa Rica and northern Argentina, and the West Indies. It is a serious weed on a number of tropical oceanic islands such as Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei, Indonesia, Papua New Guinea, Fiji, Seychelles, Samoa and Hawaii.

Koster's curse was first found in Australia at Julatten in Mareeba Shire in 2001.

Koster's curse prefers humid tropical lowlands and therefore could spread to humid coastal sites in the Northern Territory, over much of north-eastern Queensland and down the coast to northern New South Wales.

Control methods

All suspected sightings of Koster's curse plants must be reported to Biosecurity Queensland, which will work with the relevant person to control the plant. Anyone finding suspected plants should immediately take steps to minimise the risk of Koster's curse spreading.

Further information

Further information is available from your local government office, or by contacting Biosecurity Queensland on 13 25 23 or visit www.biosecurity.qld.gov.au.

Cover photograph (leaf and flowers) courtesy of C Wilson

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Fact sheets are available from Department of Agriculture and Fisheries (DAF) service centres and our Customer Service Centre (telephone 13 25 23). Check our website at www.biosecurity.qld.gov.au to ensure you have the latest version of this fact sheet. The control methods referred to in this fact sheet should be used in accordance with the restrictions (federal and state legislation, and local government laws) directly or indirectly related to each control method. These restrictions may prevent the use of one or more of the methods referred to, depending on individual circumstances. While every care is taken to ensure the accuracy of this information, DAF does not invite reliance upon it, nor accept responsibility for any loss or damage caused by actions based on it.

Map 1. Distribution of Koster's curse in Queensland

