



Paterson's Curse

(*Echium plantagineum*)

Declared Plant Requiring Management

Listed under the Biosecurity and Agriculture Management Act 2007

Why is it a problem?

Paterson's curse is an annual plant native to the Mediterranean region. It is a classic 'garden thug' having been introduced via mail order gardening catalogues in the 1840s, then rapidly invading agricultural land.

Paterson's curse now covers millions of hectares of land in southern Australia (from WA to northern New South Wales) and is estimated to cost Australian sheep and cattle producers \$250 million annually through lost productivity in pastures, control costs, and wool contamination.

It is highly competitive in pastures, replacing desirable plants without contributing to forage value. Paterson's curse contains pyrrolizidine alkaloids, which are toxic to livestock, particularly horses, though sheep can graze it for a time. Prolonged grazing of Paterson's curse is harmful, even to sheep, because the alkaloids eventually cause liver damage, especially if stock consume large amounts of this weed in winter and spring and then graze on common heliotrope over summer.

What does it look like?

An erect annual (occasionally biennial) herb to 1.5 metres high, commonly 30-60 centimetres, reproducing by seed.

Stems

One to several stems arise from base, much branched and covered with stiff white hairs.

Leaves

Alternate, bristly. Rosette leaves to 25 centimetres long, oval to oblong, stalked and with distinct lateral veins. Stem leaves are smaller and narrower, not stalked and almost clasping the stem.

Flowers

Purple, rarely pink or white, crowded along one side of a curved spike. Five petals joined in a curved trumpet shape, two to three centimetres long. Five stamens, two of which are longer than the others and extend beyond the petals.

Fruit

A group of four nutlets surrounded by a stiffly bristled calyx.

Seeds

Brown to grey, two to three millimetres long, three sided strongly wrinkled and pitted.





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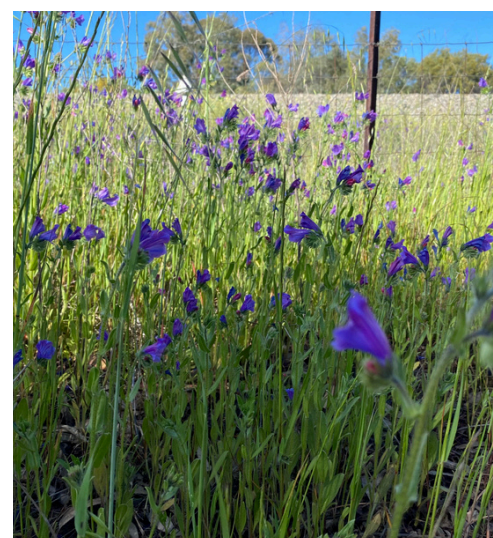
How do we control it?

Biological control

Biological control aims to limit the dominance of Paterson's curse to make it economically insignificant to farmers. Biological control is not an eradication program. It can take many years for the insects to reach their full potential and spread. Biological control requires more than one agent. For Paterson's curse there is a suite of four insects that have been released. Each insect attacks a different life stage of the plant. In some areas, these insects have caused a significant reduction in Paterson seed production.

Biosecurity

Practice good biosecurity. Take particular care when buying seed and feed. Cheap hay is not a bargain if it's full of weed seeds. It is an offence under the Biosecurity and Agriculture Management Act 2007 to sell or transport hay or other materials containing declared plants – offences can be reported to the Pest and Disease Information Service. Gardeners should take care when purchasing animal manure or loamy soil that it doesn't contain Paterson's curse or other weed seeds.



Where can landowners find more information?

For more information please visit the Department of Agriculture and Food's Website:

<https://www.agric.wa.gov.au/pests-weeds-diseases/weeds> or contact them direct on 1300 374 731.

Additionally, you can find more information on the Shire of Northam's website: www.northam.wa.gov.au or contact the Environmental Sustainability Officer on 9622 6100.