



Calotrope

Kapok tree, King's crown, Cabbage tree, Rubber tree
Calotropis procera



Description

Calotrope (*Calotropis procera*) is a spreading shrub or small tree which can grow up to 4 m high. A milky sap oozes from any part of the plant which is cut or broken. Stems are smooth and pale greyish-green. Mature stems have a characteristic beige corrugated bark, cork-like in appearance and texture.

The grey-green leaves are attached in opposite pairs directly to the stem. Leaves are large, 10–20 cm long and 4–10 cm wide, with a short pointed tip and a heart-shaped base.

Flowers grow in groups in the forks of the uppermost leaves, up to fifteen flowers per group. The five-petalled waxy flowers are white with purple tips inside and have a central purplish crown.

The large, green, inflated fruit is rounded at the base and somewhat pointed at the tip, similar in shape to a mango. It grows 8–12 cm long and nearly as wide. When ripe, the fruit bursts and releases numerous seeds which have tufts of long, silky hairs at one end. These can be carried long distances by the wind.

Habitat and distribution

Calotrope, a native of tropical Africa and Asia, was introduced into Australia as an ornamental shrub. In Queensland it has become naturalised in the semi-arid north, particularly in the Gulf of Carpentaria Region. Infestations on some of the Gulf Islands are quite extensive, particularly in association with sandy foreshore areas.

Calotrope is a weed of roadsides and watercourses and commonly invades old cultivated land and overgrazed areas where there is little competition from grass. Calotrope may spread rapidly from the base of plants and from seedlings unless there is vigorous competition from grass or other herbs. Even in cases where the above-ground plant has disappeared, calotrope often regrows from the root system when conditions become favourable.

Problem

Calotrope can readily become established on overgrazed pastoral land or land disturbed by road making. Dense thickets can form on alluvial flats and along rivers, reducing grazing and water access and substantially reducing the value of the country. The plant is poisonous to humans. Reports are that cattle can eat the plant with no known ill effects in the dry season, but if they are subjected to stress (mustering, etc.), they may die from calotrope poisoning.

Control

Calotrope roots are large and spongy; new plants quickly grow from underground tubers. This makes any form of mechanical control (including fire) difficult.

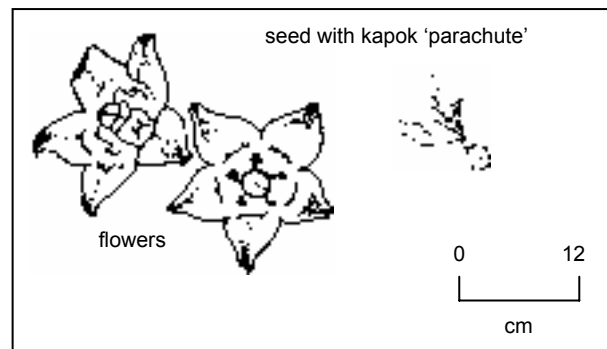
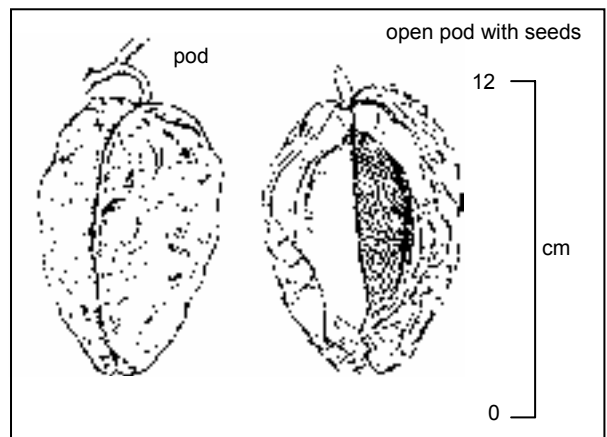
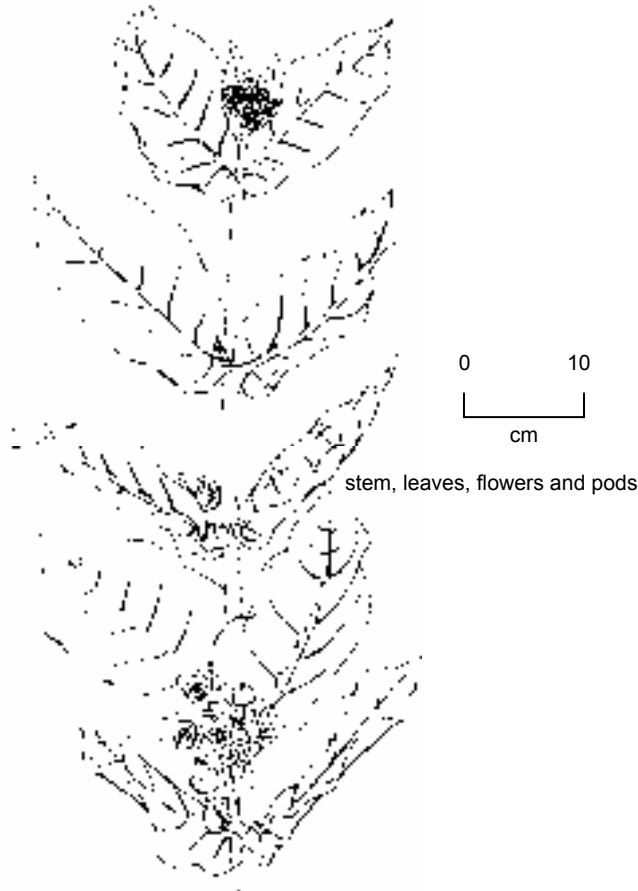
Research has shown several herbicides effective as foliar spray, cut stump, or basal bark methods of control. These are in the process of being registered. For information about this research, contact the Tropical Weeds Research Centre on 07 4787 0600.

The best approach is usually to combine different methods. The control methods you choose should suit the specific weed and your particular situation.

Look at your weed problem carefully. Can you realistically eradicate it? Or should you contain the weed to stop new infestations developing while you reduce existing ones? How does weed control fit into your property plan? What can you do to restore areas and prevent re-establishment?

Further information

Further information is available from the vegetation management/weed control/environmental staff at your local government. ■



Fact sheets are available from NRW service centres and the NRW Information Centre phone (07 3237 1435). Check our web site <www.nrw.qld.gov.au> to ensure you have the latest version of this fact sheet. The control methods referred to in this Pest Fact 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 utilisation 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, the Department of Natural Resources and Water does not invite reliance upon it, nor accept responsibility for any loss or damage caused by actions based on it.