Crofton weed

Ageratina adenophora

Crofton weed is most prevalent in south eastern Queensland invading pastures and colonising roadsides and forest edges. It is an aggressive weed which is poisonous to horses causing Tallebudgera Horse Disease.

Crofton weed was introduced to Australia in 1875 as an ornamental plant but soon spread out of control. Newly cleared land along the NSW and Queensland border in 1940's was soon overrun.

Control is best achieved by good pasture management with timely herbicide use.

Description

Crofton weed is a shrubby perennial with a woody rootstock and numerous upright branching stems. It usually grows 1 to 2 m high.

Young stems are soft and establish roots where they touch the ground. The leaves are bright green, trowel-shaped, 50-75 mm long, 25−50 mm broad with the edges toothed.

Flowers are white, in small, dense heads at the ends of the branches. Seeds are slender, angular, 2 mm long, almost black, with fine white hairs at the tip.

Problem

Crofton weed is an aggressive weed in pastures in the valleys and on the plateaus in south-eastern Queensland. On wet slopes it has invaded kikuyu grass pasture.

The plant is poisonous causing a disease in horses known in Queensland as "Tallebudgera Horse Disease" and in New South Wales as "Numinbah Horse Sickness", an acute pulmonary consolidation of the lungs.

No method of preventing losses is known, other than denying horses access to crofton weed or refraining from working them hard.

Habitat and distribution

Crofton weed is a native of Central America. In Queensland it is restricted to the south-eastern corner, mainly south of Brisbane. In the valleys leading out from the McPherson Range and the adjoining plateau areas this plant has become firmly established. Scattered infestations occur in drier scrub soils west and north of Brisbane.

It is frequently associated with shaded, wet areas fringing forests (including rain forests) and along streams. Southerly-facing damp slopes appear favoured. It is found as a weed along roadsides and overgrazed pastures.

Life cycle

Crofton weed usually buds in August and flowers from September on, producing many wind-blown ‘seeds’ (achenes). After flowering, the top of the plant senesces and reshoots from the base.

Crofton weed can germinate during wet summer periods and develop into good sized plants within twelve weeks, to flower the following spring.

Declaration details

Crofton weed is not a declared plant under current Queensland legislation. It may however be declared under the laws of your local council.

Control

Management strategies

Control of small infestations before flowering is strongly recommended to prevent developing into large infestations which can be very difficult to control.

When plants have died following chemical spraying, the area should be planted to pasture grasses to provide competition against seedling regrowth. Newly established pasture preferably should not be grazed until they have set seed (about twelve months). Remove any regrowth of crofton weed manually, or by high volume application (spot spray) of a selective herbicide (one which does not damage the pasture) in accordance with Table 1.

Mechanical control

Cultivation, grubbing, hoeing and burning, along with planting of competitive pastures combined with fertilisation, will control the weed in accessible areas.

Biological control

A stem gall-fly was introduced in 1951 but was heavily parasitised and exerts little impact on plants. A leaf spot fungus (*Cercospora eupatoris*) does exert some effect, especially on seedlings.

Herbicide control

Table 1 lists the herbicides registered for crofton weed control. Before using any herbicide always read the label carefully. All herbicides must be applied strictly in accordance with the directions on the label.

Further information

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

TABLE 1 – HERBICIDES REGISTERED FOR THE CONTROL OF CROFTON WEED

Situation	Herbicide	Rate	Comments[1]	
pastures; non-agricultural, commercial land; rights-of-way	glyphosate 360 g/L	0.5 L/100 L 75 mL/ 15 L	Handgun application, high volume foliar spray. Note: will also kill pasture Knapsack application, high volume foliar spray	
pastures; non-agricultural, commercial land; rights-of-way	fluroxypyr (200 g/L) e.g.Starane®	0.5 L/100 L 75 mL/15 L	High volume Knapsack	
pastures; non-agricultural, commercial land; rights-of-way	picloram + 2,4-D 75 g + 300 g e.g.Tordon 75-D®	0.65 L/100 L	Spot spray	
pastures; non-agricultural, commercial land; rights-of-way	picloram + triclopyr e.g.Grazon®	0.35 L/100 L 2.5 L/100 L	 Misting	
pastures	dicamba + MCPA e.g.Banvel M®	2.8-4 L/ha 0.19-0.27 L/100L 60 mL/15 L	Boom spray Handgun Knapsack	Use higher rate for larger plants. Avoid spraying legume pastures
pastures; non-agricultural, commercial land; rights-of-way	metsulfuron methyl e.g.Brush Off®	15 g/100 L	Handgun. Thoroughly wet all foliage but not to run off	

Note 1. Overall spray plants to the point of runoff using a power spray or a knapsack preferably at the budding stage of growth. ■