

KHAKI WEED

Alternanthera pungens



Photographs are courtesy of Dr Sheldon Navie

Description & life cycle

A low-lying, creeping perennial, Khaki weed is widespread throughout Queensland & many other parts of Australia, including northern NSW and the Northern Territory

Khaki weed spreads readily, thanks to its many sharp burrs, which attach to animals and motor vehicle tyres. The same burrs are a problem for picnickers and people who like walking around in bare feet!

This native of South America has a deep, carrot-like taproot, up to 12mm in diameter and 100mm long. Roots form at the stem and nodes allow it to form a thick mat.

Leaves are up to 5cm long, oval-shaped with pointed tips, in unequal opposite pairs. Stems are up to 500mm long, branched and reddish purple, covered with short, soft hairs.

Flowers are very small, in the axils of leaves, surrounded by fine, straw-coloured, sharply pointed burrs. The flowers emit a pungent odour, hence the species name "pungens".

Khaki weed reproduces readily from its large quantities of seed, roots and stems-nodes taking root. Seeds are viable for many years and germinate after spring or summer rains. Flowering and seeding occurs in summer and autumn, accompanied by the sharp prickle-like burrs which can pierce the skin.

Key features

- > The sharp burrs can be a real nuisance during summer and autumn.
- > Forming a thick mat, Khaki weed invades parks, ovals and other public open spaces.
- > A deep taproot makes it difficult to control.

Control

1. Small infestations can be dug out or removed by hand (with gloves), prior to seeding.
2. Consider the use of a pre-emergent herbicide to break the plant's life cycle, in situations where Khaki weed has built up significant populations.
3. Large infestations in ovals & other grass areas require the application of a selective herbicide, suitable for the particular grass species. Khaki weed seedlings are susceptible to a range of selective herbicide formulations and to achieve the best results, Technigro recommends that applications be made while the weeds are young and actively growing and prior to the plant producing seed.

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