



1. Habit in flower. 2. Tubular flower with yellow throat. 3. Leaves with tendrils and broad heart-shaped leaflets. 4. Old woody stem.



Monkey's Comb (*Pithecoctenium crucigerum*)

Introduced

Not Declared

Monkey's Comb is a vine from Central and South America that has spread from cultivation as a garden ornamental in Australia. Like several other vines in the Bignoniaceae plant family, it has become a weed in the coastal districts of south-eastern Queensland and NSW.

Distribution

This vine is cultivated in the tropical, sub-tropical and warm temperate regions of Australia. It was first recorded becoming naturalised in Noosa National Park, on the Sunshine Coast, in 1986. Since then it has been recorded several times in the Sydney area and at Brunswick Heads in northern NSW. It has also been recorded in several Brisbane suburbs (i.e. Indooroopilly, Ashgrove, Wacol and Bardon), in the Beaudesert area, and on the Gold Coast in south-eastern Queensland.

Description

Monkey's Comb is a vigorous climber that can grow up into the canopy of trees and eventually develops thick woody stems. Its younger stems are obviously six-sided in nature, with raised ribs that are lost with age. They are sparsely hairy when young and have leaves arranged in opposite pairs. These leaves are borne on stalks 2-11 cm long, are compound, and may be of two distinct structural types. Some leaves have three leaflets, but most usually have the third leaflet replaced by a tendril (which can sometimes be lost with age). The tendrils, when present, are usually coiled and always branched near their tips. The leaflets are relatively broad and often heart-shaped (4-17 cm long and 2-12 cm wide) with entire margins and are usually drawn out into a pointed tip.

Tubular flowers are produced in summer, and are most abundant in December in Brisbane. They are arranged in elongated clusters (3-27 cm long), with 3 to 30 flowers in each cluster. Each flower has a small green cup-shaped structure at the base (8-15 mm wide), which is formed from the fused sepals. The petals are also fused together into a long tube (3-6 cm long) which has an obvious bend near the base and five small spreading lobes at the tip. The outside of the flower is cream in colour and velvety hairy in nature, while the inside and the petal lobes are usually yellow. The fruit is a large woody capsule (8-30 cm long and 3.5-8 cm wide) covered with small prickly appendages and containing numerous papery seeds, but it is not known to be produced in Australia.

Quick Facts

- > An aggressive vine that climbs up into the forest canopy.
- > Six-sided younger stems with leaves borne in pairs.
- > Most of its leaves have two leaflets and a coiled tendril.
- > Tubular cream-coloured flowers with yellow throats.

Habitat

Monkey's Comb is known to grow in any disturbed habitat in its native range. It has mainly been recorded along roadsides, in riparian vegetation, and along forest margins in Australia.





1. Infestation along Enoggera Creek in Brisbane. 2. New growth with developing leaves and tendrils.

Reproduction and Dispersal

This species reproduces by wind-dispersed seed in the Americas, but fruit have not been reported from Australia. In this country it is only known to reproduce vegetatively via stem fragments, which readily produce roots when they come into contact with soil. It is initially spread into bushland areas in dumped garden waste, but is probably also dispersed down waterways during floods.

Why is it an Emerging Threat?

This species is regarded as both geographically and ecologically one of the most wide-ranging species of the Bignoniaceae. While it only reproduces vegetatively in Australia, it forms large and dense colonies that quickly outcompete and smother other species. Also, many of the infestations reported from Australia so far have been from the edges of conservation reserves.

Control Methods

Monkey's Comb can be removed by hand, but appropriate disposal of the rootstock and all stem fragments is essential. This method should only be attempted with smaller infestations, and with great care, as it could lead to dispersal of stem fragments and the spread of the infestation to new areas if it is not done properly.

While no herbicides are currently registered for the control of Monkey's Comb in Australia, the use of several products is permitted for the control of invasive vines in Queensland via APVMA off-label permit number PER 11463 (<http://permits.apvma.gov.au/PER11463.PDF>). For larger infestations of this species, which usually cover other vegetation and reach a great height, foliar application is usually not appropriate. Hence, scrape and paint, cut and paste or basal bark application methods should be preferred in these circumstances.

Please read this permit carefully and refer to it for the appropriate products and rates to use. Unless otherwise stated in this permit, the use of any product must be in accordance with the instructions on its label. Within other state boundaries, it is recommended that all managers consult any relevant permits or government legislation applicable to their region.

Look a-likes

Monkey's Comb is very similar to some other introduced vines when not in flower, including Orange Trumpet Creeper (*Pyrostegia venusta*) and Argentine Trumpet Vine (*Clytostoma callistegioides*). These species also have leaves with two or three leaflets and tendrils, however Monkey's Comb can usually be distinguished from these by its broader heart-shaped leaflets.



Top: Orange Trumpet Creeper in flower.

Bottom: Similar leaves, which are not heart-shaped.

The control methods referred to in Weed Watch™ 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, Technigro does not invite reliance upon it, nor accept responsibility for any loss or damage caused by actions based on it.

This information has been developed with the assistance of Dr Sheldon Navie. Photographs are also courtesy of Dr Sheldon Navie © Technigro Australia Pty Ltd 2013

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