



1. Toothed leaves and inconspicuous flowers. 2. Burr-like fruit with tiny hooked prickles. 3. Close-up of creeping stem with roots. 4. Infestation in Robina, Queensland.



Paraguay burr (*Acanthospermum australe*)

Introduced

Not Declared

Paraguay burr is a long-lived, or rarely short-lived, creeping plant that is an emerging weed of roadsides, footpaths, lawns, gardens, waste areas and disturbed sites. It is a member of the Asteraceae plant family that is native to South America and the Caribbean.

Distribution

This plant has recently become naturalised in the near-coastal parts of south-eastern Queensland. It is also more widely naturalised in the coastal districts of central New South Wales, between the Hunter Valley and Wollongong.

This species was first recorded in south-eastern Queensland on South Stradbroke Island in 1994. Most herbarium records are from the coastal parts of the Gold Coast (i.e. Southport, South Stradbroke Island and The Spit). More recently it has been recorded at Robina, in the Gold Coast hinterland, and there are also anecdotal reports from Redland City Council. It seems to be spreading northwards and may soon be found in other parts of this region.

Description

Usually a long-lived plant with creeping stems (10-60 cm long) that can form dense mats of vegetation. The younger stems are green and hairy, while older stems may become somewhat woody in nature. The paired leaves (1-4 cm long and 0.5-3 cm wide) are borne on short stalks with bluntly-toothed margins and pointed tips. They are covered in numerous tiny dots and also sparsely covered with close-lying hairs.

The inconspicuous flower-heads are borne singly on short stalks in the upper leaf forks. These flower-heads are surrounded by two rows of five (rarely four or six) green bracts. The outer row of bracts are very small (1-2 mm long), while the inner row of bracts are up to 10 mm long. Each flower-head has two different types of tiny flowers. The five outer flowers are female, while the 5-10 inner flowers are male and whitish in colour. Flowering occurs mainly during summer. The ribbed 'seeds' develop from the female flowers and are burr-like in nature. These 'seeds' (7-9 mm long) are oval or spindle-shaped and covered in numerous small hooked prickles (1-2 mm long).

Quick Facts

- > Creeping plant that forms dense mats in mown areas
- > Prefers sandy soils in near-coastal areas
- > Produces burr-like fruit covered in small hooked prickles

Habitat

Paraguay burr is currently found in sand dunes and sandy soils along footpaths and roadsides in the near-coastal areas of eastern Australia. It is also a weed of relatively dry, open, disturbed sites in the USA and Hawaii and has been recorded as a weed of crops in South Africa and South America.





1. Habit of Paraguay burr. 2. Infestation on coastal sand dune at Labrador, Queensland

Reproduction and Dispersal

Paraguay burr reproduces by seed and vegetatively via its creeping stems. Its 'burrs' are commonly dispersed after becoming attached to animals, clothing and vehicles. They are probably also dispersed by water, mowers and slashers, and during road maintenance activities. Stem segments may be also spread by mowers and road maintenance vehicles, and in contaminated soil.

Why is it an Emerging Threat?

This plant is well adapted to growing in mown areas and is easily spread by road and vegetation maintenance activities. Hence, it may become an undesirable weed of turfed areas such as footpaths, lawns, parks and sporting fields. Its burr-like fruit, while not as sharp as bindii or khaki weed, could also become a nuisance to users of such public areas.

Paraguay burr also invades coastal sand dunes where it may replace native mat-forming species, particularly in hind-dune vegetation.

Control Methods

Individual plants can be manually removed preferably before the production of woody growth and prior to the setting of seed. Care should be taken to remove all parts of the plant due to its ability to reproduce vegetatively. Good hygiene should be practiced by ensuring that upon leaving infested areas all vehicles and clothing etc are checked for burrs or pieces of removed specimens. All specimens should be contained and bagged for disposal prior to leaving the infested area.

While no chemicals are specifically registered for the control of Paraguay Burr in non-crop situations in Australia, a chemical option can be utilised where this method of control is preferable. Despite little documentation being currently available, research trials carried-out by the Mississippi State University (<http://msucares.com/pubs/publications/pl934.htm#P>) suggest Glyphosate provides excellent results for the control of this species. Within Queensland, the use of an appropriate formulation of Glyphosate for the spot spraying of environmental weeds such as Paraguay Burr in non-crop situations is permitted via APVM off-label permit 11463 (<http://permits.apvma.gov.au/PERI11463.PDF>). Before applying this method of control within other state boundaries, it is recommended that all operators consult any relevant permits or government legislation.

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 Navie. © Technigro Australia Pty Ltd 2010

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Look a-likes

Paraguay burr is usually easily recognised by its hooked burrs. It is similar to star burr (*Acanthospermum hispidum*), but this plant can be distinguished by its upright habit and the fact its burrs have two larger spines at their tips.



Top. Upright habit of star burr

Bottom. Mature burrs with large spines at their tips