

1. Habit growing in a lawn area 2. Leaves and small flowers with six petals 3. Close-up of stem covered with sticky hairs 4. Dense infestation in a park at Helensvale



Colombian waxweed (*Cuphea carthagenensis*)

Introduced

Not Declared

Colombian waxweed is a short-lived herbaceous plant from tropical America that is also known by the names tarweed and Colombian cuphea. While it has been present in Australia for some time, this member of the Lythraceae plant family has become more abundant in recent years. It is quickly becoming a common weed of native vegetation, pastures and amenity areas in the wetter parts of south-eastern Queensland and north-eastern NSW.

Distribution

This species was first recorded becoming naturalised in the Murwillumbah district of New South Wales in 1973. It then appeared in the Bundaberg area in Queensland in the 1980s. Since this time it has spread throughout the area in between, including into the Greater Brisbane and Gold Coast regions. It is now quite common and widespread in the wetter parts of south-eastern Queensland and north-eastern NSW.

Description

Colombian waxweed is an upright or spreading short-lived plant usually growing up to 45 cm tall, but occasionally reaching 60 cm in height. Its slender stems are densely covered in sticky hairs and may be green or reddish in colour. Its leaves are arranged in pairs along the stems and may be borne on very short stalks or appear almost stalkless. These small leaves (1-6 cm long and 5-25 mm wide) are somewhat oval in shape with pointed tips.

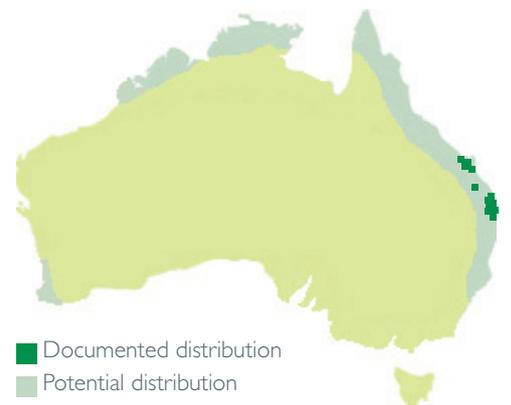
The small pink or purple flowers are borne singly or in small clusters in the leaf forks or at the tips of the branches. These flowers have a green or reddish tube at the base (4-7 mm long) that is topped with six tiny pinkish petals (1.5-2 mm long). The fruit is a tiny rounded capsule (2-5 mm across) that is contained inside the tubular flower base. When the seeds are still green this tube splits open down one side to expose them. The cluster of 4-8 exposed seeds (each about 2 mm across) quickly turn brown in colour and are shed shortly afterwards.

Quick Facts

- > A small short-lived plant usually less than 45cm tall
- > Stems densely covered with sticky hairs and bearing leaves in pairs.
- > Small pink or purplish flowers usually found in the leaf forks
- > Small brown seeds that are exposed prior to being shed.

Habitat

This species is commonly found growing in moister habitats, such as in or along waterways, swamps, wetlands or drainage lines. However, it is also found as a weed of pastures in rural areas and in managed vegetation in urban areas (mown parks, along roadsides and in amenity gardens).





1. Habit growing along a footpath 2. Close-up of brown seeds

Reproduction and Dispersal

Colombian waxweed reproduces only by seed. These seeds are probably spread to new areas by water during floods, on mowers and slashers, in mud attached to vehicles and machinery, and in contaminated agricultural produce.

Why is it an Emerging Threat?

This species is starting to take over mown vegetation in urban areas on the Gold Coast, where it is replacing desirable grasses and decreasing the aesthetic and amenity value of these areas. It can also form very dense populations in pastures, replacing desirable pasture grasses and reducing the productivity of invaded areas. It also competes with and replaces native species in bushland areas, particularly in moist sites that have been disturbed in some way.

Control Methods

Individual plants may be easily hand-pulled, bagged, and disposed of in an appropriate manner, if found in small quantities in natural areas. However, this is usually impractical with larger infestations and is not inappropriate for the management of pastures and mown vegetation.

Chemical control may be required in these situations. The use of selective broadleaf herbicides should be the most suitable control option for mown vegetation and native grass pastures, but as yet there are no specific registrations for this species or details available as to which products are most effective against it.

Where large infestations of this weed are present in wetter sites in natural areas, spraying with an aquatically registered herbicide may be the only practical option. Within Queensland, the use of aquatically registered formulations of Glyphosate 360 (e.g. Round-up Biactive and Weedmaster Duo) is permitted for the spot spraying of environmental weeds such as *Cuphea carthagenensis* in non-crop situations via the APVMA off-label permit number PER 11463 (<http://permits.apvma.gov.au/PER11463.PDF>). However, unless otherwise stated in this permit, the use of the 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.

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 2011

Look a-likes

Colombian waxweed is closely related to Mexican heather (*Cuphea hyssopifolia*), a similar plant which is commonly cultivated in gardens in Australia. However, Mexican heather has smaller leaves (up to 20 mm long and 5 mm wide) and its stems are not covered in sticky hairs.



Top. Habit of Mexican heather

Bottom. Close-up of flowers and smaller leaves