



1. Covering a bare area along a footpath in Brisbane. 2. Seedling. 3. Close-up of flowers and immature fruit. 4. Matted Sandmat in flower.



Matted Sandmat (*Chamaesyce serpens*)

Introduced

Not Declared

Matted Sandmat is a small creeping plant native to the Americas (i.e. USA, Mexico, Central America, the Caribbean and South America) that is also known as creeping spurge. It has become established as a weed of habitation and disturbed sites in Queensland. This plant has been present in Australia for some time, but its identity has only recently been discovered.

Distribution

The first collection of this species was made from along railway tracks near the town of Jimbour in south-eastern Queensland in 2001. It was then collected from the cracks of a footpath in Roma in 2004 and as a weed of gardens in Townsville in 2005. These very disparate collections in several parts of the state suggest that it may have been here for some time without being detected. In fact, the true identity of Matted Sandmat was only confirmed about five of years ago, and until recently it was probably confused with similar species present in Queensland.

In the last four years Matted Sandmat has also been recorded from several Brisbane suburbs, at the Gold Coast and in Hughenden in the north of the state. It is also widely naturalised in other parts of the world including the Mediterranean region, Africa and southern Asia.

Description

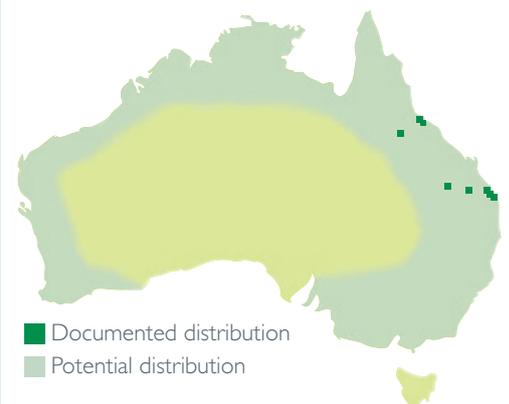
A small plant producing several branched stems up to 25 cm long that usually spread out across the ground surface. However, they may sometimes be semi-upright (15-20 cm tall) when growing amongst other plants. The slender stems (1-2 mm thick) are hairless and contain a caustic milky sap which exudes when they are broken. These stems often produce roots at their joints where they come into contact with the soil. The small leaves (2-7 mm long and 1-4 mm wide) are hairless and usually pale green or somewhat bluish-green in colour. These leaves are arranged in pairs along the stems and are borne on short stalks. They are broadly oblong, somewhat rounded or almost heart-shaped in outline with entire margins and rounded tips.

Quick Facts

- > A small creeping plant that forms a dense mat on the soil surface
- > Its stems contain a milky sap and produce roots at the joints
- > Its small pale green or bluish-green leaves are borne in pairs
- > Its tiny flowers are white with red-dish markings

Habitat

This species is a potential weed of footpaths, roadsides, railway lines, lawns, parks, landscaped areas, roadsides, gardens, waste areas, disturbed sites, orchards, vineyards, crops, nurseries and pot plants. It will grow on moist clay soils as well as on rocky or sandy soils in drier habitats.





1. Growing in a garden at Nerang on the Gold Coast. 2. Creeping stems showing roots emanating from their joints.

Description (Con't)

The tiny flowers (less than 1 mm across) are borne singly in the leaf forks near the tips of the branches. They have four tiny white structures that resemble petals, and four dark red glands. At the centre of the flower is a large pale green or bluish-green ovary borne on a thick stalk. This ovary is hairless and somewhat three-sided in nature. It develops into a yellowish-green fruit capsule (1.5-2 mm across) containing three brownish seeds.

Reproduction and Dispersal

Matted Sandmat reproduces by seed and also vegetatively via its creeping stems which root at the joints. Stem segments and seeds may be spread by mowers and slashers or in contaminated soil.

Why is it an Emerging Threat?

Matted Sandmat has the potential to become a common weed of gardens, turfed areas and production nurseries. It is not likely to become a problem in natural areas in coastal regions, but it could replace similar native groundcover species in drier inland areas.

Control Methods

Several products are available for the selective control of broadleaf weed species in turf, and any of these should be suitable for the control of Matted Sandmat in these situations. Examples include products with Dicamba, MCPA, Bromoxynil and 2,4-D as the active ingredients. On the other hand, Glyphosate products can be used to control this species in a range of areas where selective control is not required (i.e. in domestic areas, home gardens, commercial and industrial areas, and public service areas). However, before using any of these herbicides, please read their product labels carefully and follow their instructions.

Individual Matted Sandmat plants can also be removed by hand, but this is very difficult to do effectively due to the fact that the stems break off easily where they root into the soil. Appropriate protective equipment (i.e. gloves) should also be worn, and due care taken, when handling plants as the caustic sap can irritate skin and eyes.

For more information on the control of this and other Caustic Weeds, see the Technigro Weed Wise fact sheet on Caustic Weeds (<http://www.technigro.com.au/weed-wise.php>).

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

Look a-likes

Matted Sandmat is similar to several other caustic weeds, and is particularly similar to Native Caustic Weed (*Chamaesyce dallachyana*). However, it can be easily distinguished from all of these other species by the fact that its stems produce roots at their joints.



Top. Habit of Native Caustic Weed.

Bottom. Close-up of the leaves and fruit.