



1. Shrubby habit of Painted Indian Mallow. 2. Leaf with five spreading lobes. 3. Close-up of immature fruit covered in brownish hairs. 4. Drooping flower with reddish veins on orange petals.



Painted Indian Mallow (*Abutilon pictum*)

Introduced

Not Declared

Painted Indian Mallow is a shrub from South America (i.e. Brazil, Argentina and Uruguay) that is grown as a garden ornamental in many parts of the world. This member of the Malvaceae plant family is also known by the name flowering maple, due to the shape of its leaves, and is beginning to display invasive tendencies in eastern Australia.

Distribution

Painted Indian Mallow has been recorded becoming naturalised in New South Wales, Victoria and Queensland in the last ten years. It was first recorded in the Melbourne suburb of Fairfield in 2002. Shortly afterwards, in September 2003, it was noted to be spreading from plantings and naturalising along a creek at Glenbrook, in the lower Blue Mountains in western Sydney. Then in early 2007 it was reported growing in riparian vegetation along Enoggera Creek in suburban Brisbane. At this location it was excluding most other understorey plants and formed a relatively large and dense colony over a couple of hundred square metres. More recently, it has been recorded from the edge of tropical rainforest in Wooroonooran National Park in northern Queensland.

Description

Painted Indian Mallow is an upright shrub usually growing 1-2.5 m tall, but may occasionally reach 3-5 m in height. Its younger stems are smooth and green or bluish-green, while its older stems are grey or greyish-brown in colour. The alternately arranged leaves are borne on stalks 3-15 cm long. These leaves (5-15 cm long and 5-15 cm wide) usually have five pointed lobes with toothed margins and they resemble a maple leaf. Their upper surfaces are hairless, while their undersides are sparsely covered in tiny star-shaped hairs.

The reddish-orange flowers (about 3-5 cm across) are borne singly in the upper leaf forks on drooping stalks 7-10 cm long. They have five green sepals (about 2 cm long) that are fused at the base into a short tube. The five petals (3-5 cm long) do not open fully, giving the flowers a somewhat tubular appearance. These petals are usually orange with prominent red or purplish coloured veins. In the centre of each flower are numerous small yellow stamens that are fused together at the base into a column about 3.5 cm long. The flowers also have a long style that separates into ten short branches, each ending in a small round stigma. The mature fruit (15-20 mm wide) looks like a capsule, but it is made up of ten segments. These fruit are green when young and covered in brownish star-shaped hairs. They turn dark brown or almost blackish in colour as they mature and the segments split open. Each segment contains several kidney-shaped seeds.

Quick Facts

- > A shrub with five-lobed leaves that resemble those of a maple tree
- > Older stems produce roots where they come into contact with soil
- > Orange drooping flowers with darker reddish or purplish veins
- > Capsule-like fruit that split into segments when mature

Habitat

This species has so far been found growing in riparian vegetation, urban bushland and the understorey of disturbed forests. It is a potential weed of these habitats as well as forest margins, roadsides, disturbed sites and waste areas.





1. Dense infestation in the understorey of riparian vegetation. 2. Woody stems spreading by layering.

Reproduction and Dispersal

Painted Indian Mallow reproduces by seed and also vegetatively via a process called layering, where its stems produce roots when they fall over and come into contact with the soil. It has already shown an ability to form large and very dense colonies by layering. Stem fragments and seeds are probably initially spread into bushland in dumped garden waste, but may also be dispersed downstream by floodwaters.

Why is it an Emerging Threat?

This species has begun to escape cultivation in recent years and invade riparian habitats. The almost simultaneous appearance of Painted Indian Mallow in three separate states and its dense colony-forming habit indicates that it has the potential to become an environmental weed in many of the wetter coastal districts of Australia.

Control Methods

Individual plants or small colonies of Painted Indian Mallow may be physically removed, but care should be taken collect and remove all material as pieces of stem that are left on the ground will easily take root if conditions are favourable.

Chemical control may be more suitable for larger colonies, but there is currently little information available as to which products are most effective on this species. Basal bark or foliar applications are recommended over cut stump applications, because all of the cut stems would need to be collected and removed to prevent their re-establishment.

In Queensland, products containing 2,4-D, dicamba, fluxoroxypyr, glyphosate, metsulfuron, picloram and triclopyr can be used to control woody environmental weeds such as Painted Indian Mallow as outlined in APVMA off-label Permit 11463 (see <http://permits.apvma.gov.au/PERI1463.PDF>). Please read the off-label permit carefully for the exact products and rates to use and, unless otherwise stated in the permit, the use of any of these herbicides must be in accordance with the instructions on their labels. Within other state boundaries, it is recommended that any relevant permits or government legislation applicable to the region be consulted.

Look a-likes

Painted Indian Mallow is very similar to some Chinese Lantern (*Abutilon × hybridum*) cultivars, as it is one of the parent species of this group of ornamental hybrids. Chinese Lantern is also beginning to become naturalised in Australia, but it only spreads vegetatively. Its flowers come in a wide range of colours (e.g. red, orange, pink, yellow and white) and are usually much more open in nature (5-10 cm across).



Top. Chinese lantern plant with larger yellow flowers.

Bottom. Close-up of orange flower lacking obvious reddish veins.

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 courtesy of Dr Sheldon Navie and Robert Whyte. © Technigro Australia Pty Ltd 2012

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