



1. Habit of plant growing on margins of Noosa National Park. 2. Drooping flowers with closed petals. 3. Mostly hairless stems and leaves. 4. Close-up of flower with protruding stigmas.



Sleeping hibiscus (*Malvaviscus penduliflorus*)

Introduced

Not Declared

Sleeping hibiscus is a member of the Malvaceae plant family that is not known from the wild. It is thought to have been developed in cultivation, but may have also have originated in southern Mexico. It is very similar to, and often confused with, Turk's cap (*Malvaviscus arboreus*).

Distribution

Sleeping hibiscus is widely grown as a garden ornamental, particularly in the sub-tropical regions of Australia, and was first recorded becoming naturalised in south-eastern Queensland in the late 1990s. It is now quite widespread and is becoming common in the coastal districts of south-eastern Queensland, particularly along waterways near population centres. It has also occasionally been recorded in north-eastern New South Wales and in northern Queensland.

Description

A shrub usually growing up to 2 m tall, but occasionally reaching up to 4 m in height. The stems are green and sometimes sparsely hairy when young, but quickly become hairless. They turn greyish in colour and become woody as they mature. The alternately arranged leaves (5-20 cm long and 3-12 cm wide) have toothed margins and pointed tips. They can range from relatively broad to relatively narrow in shape and can sometimes also be slightly lobed. Both leaf surfaces are mostly hairless or sparsely hairy when they are young.

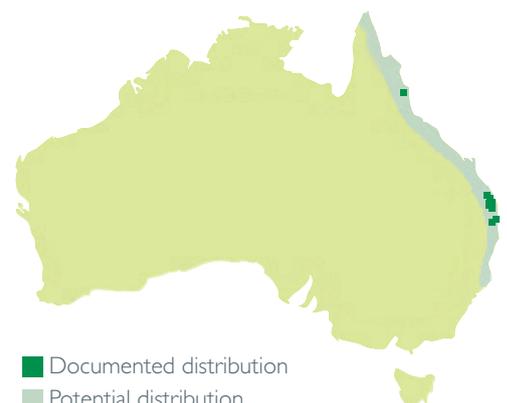
The flowers are borne singly in the upper leaf forks on hairy stalks 1.5-6 cm long. These flowers (5-7 cm long) usually droop downwards and appear somewhat tubular in shape. The five bright red petals usually remain relatively closed and are never open and spreading like other hibiscus species. The numerous small stamens and stigmas are fused together and form a narrow tube about 7 cm long, which is slightly projected beyond the petals. A cultivar with pink flowers (i.e. *Malvaviscus penduliflorus* 'Rosea') is sometimes also seen in cultivation. Fruit are not produced by this species.

Quick Facts

- > A shrub growing up to 4 m tall.
- > Younger stems and leaves are sparsely hairy or hairless.
- > Bright red flowers borne singly on hairy stalks 1.5-6 cm long.
- > These drooping flowers (5-7 cm long) usually remain relatively closed.

Habitat

Sleeping hibiscus is mainly a weed of vegetation along waterways and in wetlands, but it can also be found growing in urban bushland, on forest margins, along roadsides, and in disturbed sites and waste areas.





1. Infestation along a small waterway. 2. Pink-flowered form.

Reproduction and Dispersal

This species reproduces only vegetatively, via layering and stem segments. Pieces of its stems are often initially dispersed in dumped garden waste, but once they are established along waterways they may also be spread downstream during floods.

Why is it an Emerging Threat?

Sleeping hibiscus has spread from cultivation as a garden ornamental and become established in natural vegetation. This emerging environmental weed is mainly a problem along waterways and in riparian vegetation, and it is becoming common in these habitats in suburban Brisbane and other wetter parts of south-eastern Queensland. It can form dense thickets and should be controlled in sensitive bushland and conservation areas.

Control Methods

Individual plants can be manually removed with the aid of suitable tools, but attention must be taken to remove the entire crown, as plants may regrow from the base. Any pieces of stem left lying around will also take root if conditions are suitable, so care must be taken otherwise such control efforts may actually enhance the spread of this species.

There is no information readily available on the control of Sleeping hibiscus with herbicides. However, some products which are registered for the control of woody environmental weeds in Queensland via APVMA off-label Permit 11463 may be suitable (see <http://permits.apvma.gov.au/PERI11463.PDF>).

For example, some formulations of triclopyr + picloram, fluroxypyr or 2,4-D may be applied as a foliar spray directly to the target plants. Alternatively, other formulations of these same chemicals and formulations of Glyphosate can be applied as a cut stump or basal bark application. However, this plant is often found growing along waterways, and in such situations only herbicides with an aquatic registration should be used to control it (e.g. Round-up Biactive or Weedmaster Duo). Please read the permit carefully for the exact products and rates to use and, unless otherwise stated in the permit, the use of these products must be in accordance with the instructions on their labels. 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 2012

Look a-likes

Sleeping hibiscus (*Malvaviscus penduliflorus*) is very similar to Turk's cap (*Malvaviscus arboreus*), and is sometimes regarded as a variety of that species (i.e. *Malvaviscus arboreus* var. *penduliflorus*). However; Sleeping hibiscus has hairless or sparsely hairy stems and leaves while Turk's cap has densely and finely hairy stems and leaves. Sleeping hibiscus also has larger flowers (5-7 cm long) that are usually drooping in nature, while Turk's cap has relatively small flowers (2.5-5 cm long) that are usually borne in an upright position.



Top. Habit of Turk's cap.

Bottom. Velvety hairy leaves and upright flowers.