

Senegal tea plant

Gymnocoronis spilanthoides

Senegal tea plant (STP) is an aggressive, highly invasive and destructive weed occurring in scattered infestations in NSW, and could seriously threaten biodiversity if not contained.

STP is native to tropical and subtropical America (from Mexico to Argentina). It is an invasive aquatic weed in New Zealand, India and China.



Creek infestation, 5km west of Mullumbimby.

Distribution

STP was introduced into Australia from India for the aquarium trade in the 1970s. In 1980 it was recorded as naturalised in the Manning River near Taree. Infestations have occurred at Dapto, Byron Bay and Gloucester. These have since been controlled. Current distribution in NSW includes isolated infestations on the Central Coast and in the Hunter and Sydney regions, including the Royal National Park and the Hawkesbury River. In 2012, a significant patch of STP was discovered west of Mullumbimby.

Description

STP is a perennial plant that can grow in dense stands or as clumped bushes up to 1m high.

The opposite leaves are tapered and dark green, growing from 5–20cm long and 2.5–5cm wide.

The plant has conspicuous white ball-shaped flowers approximately 1.5cm in diameter that have a strong fragrance. Flowering occurs late spring /summer and the seeds are yellow-brown, 5mm in diameter, and ribbed.

Stems are ribbed, pale green and erect, becoming prostrate as they lengthen and age. They are hollow between the nodes and are able to form tangled floating mats. Stems branch at the nodes and are 1–1.5m long and 5–10mm in diameter, increasing to 1–2cm with age.

Habitat

STP prefers tropical, subtropical and warm temperate conditions and is a hardy plant with a rapid growth rate in these areas. It will grow in shallow water, damp floodplain conditions, on the margins of creeks and dams (it has been found growing up to 150m from a water body), in wetlands and in still or slow-flowing fresh water. In these situations, it can form dense erect stands, or mats of stems extending from the banks out across the water surface. This can impede water flow, ecosystem function, as well as boating and recreational activities.

Reproduction and dispersal

The plant produces roots at the nodes and will propagate new plants from broken pieces of stem or from seed. While it produces prolific amounts of seed, seed germination appears to be a minor form of spread in Australia. Most new infestations in Australia occur as a result of plant fragments. Plant fragments can be moved in flowing water or flood waters. Plants are dormant during winter, reshooting the following spring from the crown, and also from protected buds at nodes on the stems.



Senegal tea plant *Gymnocoronis spilanthoides*

Serrations on leaf edges.



Declaration

Regional priority weed objective: Eradication

These weeds are present in limited distribution and abundance in some parts of the State. Elimination of the biosecurity risk posed by these weeds is a reasonably practical objective.

Control

Early detection and eradication will prevent the spread of this weed.

If you have seen, or think you have seen, Senegal tea plant please contact Rous County Council on (02) 6623 3800 for a positive identification.

Control should not be attempted by individuals as Senegal tea plant can spread very easily from fragments.



Buoyant stems with fine fibrous roots at the nodes.
(Photo source: Kim Hignall.)



(Photo source: Eddie Hayward.)

(Photo sources: Kim Curtis.)

For further information contact:

Rous County Council
02 6623 3800

www.rous.nsw.gov.au

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