

# Koster's curse

*Clidemia hirta*



Koster's curse is a quick-growing invasive plant that has the ability to form dense thickets, smothering native vegetation and causing major problems to primary industries. It will invade disturbed areas, including the edges of clearings and stream-banks, along fence lines, paths and roadways.

Koster's curse (*Clidemia hirta*) is a highly invasive shrub, growing up to 5 m tall. This shrub has the potential to spread rapidly over many parts of Australia. It forms dense thickets that can smother pasture and native vegetation in a similar manner to lantana. The berries produced are attractive to birds, which can assist the plant spread.

## Declaration details

Koster's curse is a declared Class 1 pest plant under *Land Protection (Pest and Stock Route Management) Act 2002*.

All landholders are required by law to keep their land free of Class 1 pests. It is a serious offence to introduce, keep or sell Class 1 pests without a permit.



Queensland Government

## Description and general information

Koster's curse is a bushy, perennial, evergreen shrub that can grow to a height of 5 m in moist, shady conditions. In harsh growing conditions it may appear as a weak and straggly small shrub.

### Leaves and stems

Leaves are elliptical in shape with toothed margins. The leaf surface has a wrinkled, papery texture and five conspicuous longitudinal veins. Stiff, reddish-brown hairs cover the stems and leaves. Leaves are normally 8–10 cm long, are oppositely arranged and hairier on the underside.

### Flowers and fruit

Koster's curse produces clusters of 6–20 small, white flowers in the leaf forks. The flowers are 1–1.5 cm in diameter and produce red-purple to blue-black berries, each 4–5 mm in diameter. The berries are also hairy and turn dark purple when mature.

Flowering and fruiting appears to occur all year, except at dry times.



*Clidemia hirta* fruit

### Life cycle

Reproduction is by seed. Each Koster's curse plant has the potential to reproduce 1000 berries a year, which can generate over 700 000 seeds.

Fruit-eating birds spread the seed, which can persist in the soil for at least four years. Seedling establishment is also very successful. Plants tolerate a range of environmental conditions and reach full maturity in less than twelve months.

## Habitat and distribution

Koster's curse has a wide native range extending from southern Mexico south to Costa Rica and northern Argentina, and the West Indies. It is a serious weed on a number of tropical oceanic islands such as Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei, Indonesia, Papua New Guinea, Fiji, Seychelles, Samoa and Hawaii.

Koster's curse was first found in Australia at Julatten in Mareeba Shire (now Tablelands Regional Council) in 2001.

Koster's curse prefers humid tropical lowlands and therefore could spread to humid coastal sites in the Northern Territory, over much of north-eastern Queensland and down the coast to northern New South Wales.

### Methods of spread

The most common method of dispersal of Koster's curse is via birds that eat the berries. The fruit may also be spread by water and human intervention, such as in potting material or mud on machinery or vehicles.

### Current status

There is only one infestation detected in Australia, near Julatten in northern Queensland. It is suspected to have entered as a contaminant of packaging material.

Koster's curse is the target of a national cost-shared eradication program, managed by Biosecurity Queensland (Department of Employment, Economic Development and Innovation, DEEDI).

### Control methods

There are no chemicals registered specifically for the control of this pest plant.

All suspected infestations should be reported to Biosecurity Queensland, who will develop a site-specific eradication program with the landholder.

### Further information

Further information is available from your local government office, or by contacting Biosecurity Queensland (call 13 25 23 or visit our website at [www.biosecurity.qld.gov.au](http://www.biosecurity.qld.gov.au)).

Fact sheets are available from Department of Employment, Economic Development and Innovation (DEEDI) service centres and our Customer Service Centre (telephone 13 25 23). Check our website at [www.biosecurity.qld.gov.au](http://www.biosecurity.qld.gov.au) to ensure you have the latest version of this fact sheet. The control methods referred to in this fact sheet 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 use 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, DEEDI does not invite reliance upon it, nor accept responsibility for any loss or damage caused by actions based on it.

Cover photograph (Leaf and flowers) courtesy of C Wilson.