

Senegal tea

Gymnocoronis spilanthoides



Senegal tea, a potentially serious water weed, has been found in Queensland. Members of the public are asked to be on the lookout for infestations.

Senegal tea has the potential to become a new water weed throughout tropical and subtropical areas of Queensland, particularly in shallow and slow-moving bodies of water.

If you find this weed, or see something that resembles Senegal tea, please contact your nearest Biosecurity Queensland office.

Senegal tea is a native of tropical and subtropical South America, and was originally introduced into Australia as an aquarium plant.

Initial infestations were located in New South Wales and Tasmania. In January 1995, Senegal tea was found along a creek bank in Redland Shire, on the outskirts of Brisbane. This was the first time this plant had been found in Queensland.

Biosecurity Queensland is working with local governments and the community to control this weed before it spreads throughout Queensland. All infestations are treated, and the surrounding areas surveyed to prevent further spread.

Declaration details

Senegal tea is a declared Class 1 pest plant under the *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.

Description and general information

There are three main characteristics that are common to some of our worst aquatic weeds, including Senegal tea:

1. leaves opposite one another on the stem
2. hollow stems
3. white flowers.

If you find a plant in a waterway that has these characteristics, please contact Biosecurity Queensland immediately.

Senegal tea is an aquatic perennial that grows over the water surface or in wet, marshy soils. The plant can grow in various forms, producing runners and floating stems up to 2.5 m in length, or growing as rounded bushes.

Leaves are 5–20 cm in length, shiny dark green with serrated margins, and grow in opposite pairs. Stems are hollow between the nodes, allowing the plant to float. Young stems are light green in colour with dark green blotches. The young round stems become six-sided as the plant matures. Flowers resemble white pompoms and are 15–20 mm in diameter. The seed is yellow-brown and ribbed.



Queensland Government

Life cycle

The majority of seeds germinate in spring though they can also germinate in summer if conditions are right. Flowering starts in late spring to early summer and continues until temperatures drop to prevent growth. Senegal tea will overwinter and become dormant when temperatures drop. Once conditions improve, seedlings will then germinate and existing stems will reshoot.

Potential impact

Senegal tea is an aggressive, invasive plant. Its stems can grow up to 15 cm per week. It can form floating mats, blocking irrigation ditches, shallow dams and other waterways.

If permitted to spread, Senegal tea will invade and degrade natural wetlands, competing strongly with slower growing native plants and affecting wetland birds and other animals dependent upon them.

Method of spread

The most important method of spread in Australia is through cultivation and sale as an aquarium or ornamental water plant, and through dumping of fish tank contents into waterways.

Senegal tea spreads by broken stem and leaf fragments and seed. Seeds can be spread by water and in soil on vehicle tyres and on animals' feet.

Control

If you find an infestation of Senegal tea, please contact Biosecurity Queensland. Do not attempt to control this weed, as it needs to be positively identified so all occurrences can be recorded before control.

If the plant is positively identified as Senegal tea, the following control options may be considered.



Mechanical control

All removed plant material should be placed in a sealed plastic bag, left in the sunlight to decompose and then disposed of at a council-approved landfill tip. Alternatively, the material should be removed and left in the sun to dry, and then burnt. Care must be taken not to leave broken plant pieces in the area.

Herbicide control

Biosecurity Queensland is seeking a minor use permit from the Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority (APVMA) for herbicides suitable for use against Senegal tea.

For updates on permit status and herbicide registration information, visit the APVMA website at www.apvma.gov.au

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).