

# Red witchweed

Prohibited invasive plant

Look. Report. Protect. 13 25 23



- It is illegal to keep, cultivate, transport or sell red witchweed in Queensland.
- Grows 5–40 cm high and attaches to roots of a ‘host’ plant.
- Flowers are 5–20 mm in diameter and are usually red, but can be white, yellow or pink.
- Leaves are arranged in opposite pairs along the stem. Leaves are 6–40 mm long and 1–4 mm wide and have a tapered pointed tip.
- The calyx (a cup like structure at the base of the flower) has 10 ribs. Native species of witchweed have calyces with five ribs.
- Seeds are very small and remain viable in the soil for up to 15 years.
- Early detection and reporting helps protect Queensland’s natural environment.

## Red witchweed detected near Mackay

Biosecurity Queensland has confirmed a serious exotic pest, red witchweed, has been found on a small number of properties near Mackay. A surveillance program has been established by Biosecurity Queensland to determine spread of the invasive plant. Control measures to reduce the risk of further spread have been put in place.

Producers in Mackay are being urged to check their crops for red witchweed. If you suspect you have this plant on your property, report it immediately to Biosecurity Queensland on 13 25 23.

## Description

Red witchweed (*Striga asiatica*) is a parasitic plant that grows attached to the roots of a ‘host’ plant. It robs its host of water and nutrients, suppressing its growth and causing chlorosis, wilting and in some cases, death.

Hosts of red witchweed include commercially important grasses and summer cereals such as sorghum, corn (maize), rice and sugarcane. It can also be found growing on a wide range of tropical grasses common in headlands and in pastures.

## Biosecurity risk

Red witchweed is a prohibited invasive plant under the *Biosecurity Act 2014*. Prohibited species must be reported immediately to Biosecurity Queensland on 13 25 23.





Without effective control, red witchweed can cause significant reductions to grain crop yield and add to management costs for growers. It can also lead to restrictions on trade in crop products.

In Africa, various species of witchweed collectively cause an estimated \$7 billion damage per year to various grain crops. In the United States, an eradication project targeted at red witchweed has been running for 50 years and has cost more than \$250 million.

### **If you suspect you have red witchweed**

1. Suspect detections must be reported to Biosecurity Queensland immediately on 13 25 23.
2. Mark or clearly note the location of the plant and where possible, take photos of the infestation so they can be used to help with identification.
3. Do not attempt to remove any flowering plants, as this may spread the tiny, dust-like seeds.
4. Do not spray the plant with herbicides without direction from Biosecurity Queensland.
5. Avoid moving any soil, machinery or products (including mulch) that might contain soil off-site. This will help avoid spread of seeds to other properties.
6. Seeds are primarily spread over long distances within soil. Therefore, do not disturb the plant until Biosecurity Queensland can investigate.

### **What should I do?**

If you think you have seen red witchweed, report it immediately to Biosecurity Queensland on 13 25 23 or scan the QR code to access our reporting web page. Until an authorised officer contacts you, please take reasonable and practical steps to prevent red witchweed from spreading.

### **More information**

Contact Biosecurity Queensland on 13 25 23 or visit [biosecurity.qld.gov.au](http://biosecurity.qld.gov.au).