

Red witchweed

Identification guide

Red witchweed (*Striga asiatica*) is a parasitic weed. It grows attached to the roots of a host plant. The weed robs its host of water and nutrients, suppressing its growth.

Red witchweed affects economically important crops such as sorghum, corn (maize), rice and sugar cane.

Early detection and control is vital to protect our agricultural industries.

Red witchweed is a notifiable pest species. If you think you've seen this weed, you must contact Biosecurity Queensland immediately on 13 25 23.

What to look for

Red witchweed grows 10–40 cm tall and its 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.

Its flowers are 5–20 mm in diameter and are usually red, but can be white, yellow or pink.

Where to look

Hosts of red witchweed include economically important grasses and summer cereals such as sorghum, corn (maize), rice and sugar cane.

It can also be found growing on a wide range of tropical grasses common in headlands and pastures.

Red witchweed can survive and produce seeds in a wide range of soils, but generally prefers free-draining sandy or gravelly soils. The most likely place to find red witchweed in a commercial crop is in these soil types.



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How it spreads

Seeds of red witchweed are tiny (dust-like) and can easily drop into the soil, enabling its spread.

Red witchweed reproduces from seeds. A single plant can produce 25 000 to 200 000 seeds. The minute seeds are dispersed by wind, water, soil movement or human activities, or by adhering to the feet, fur or feathers of animals.

When a vehicle or machine is driven through a weed-infested area, seeds can become lodged and carried considerable distances before dislodging in new areas.

Producers should observe a property hygiene protocol and avoid moving equipment and other things that might carry soil if not appropriately washed down.

Adequate wash-down of machinery and equipment, and observation of other biosecurity precautions can reduce the risk of spreading red witchweed.

More information

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For more information on red witchweed, visit www.daff.qld.gov.au.



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If you suspect you have red witchweed

1. Producers must report the plant to Biosecurity Queensland on **13 25 23**.
2. Take photos of the infestation and store until you are contacted by Biosecurity Queensland.
3. Do not attempt to remove any flowering plants, as this may spread the tiny, dust-like seeds.
4. 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.
5. Seeds are primarily spread over long distances within soil. Therefore, keep the weed in place until Biosecurity Queensland can investigate.

