

# Mexican poppy

## *Argemone ochroleuca*

HABIT	STEMS & BRANCHES	LEAVES	FLOWERS	FRUIT & SEED
				
<p>Robust, erect annual herb grows to 1m tall.</p> <p>Found in seasonal creeks, streambeds, drainage lines and disturbed areas.</p>	<p>Stems release a yellow sap when cut and are covered with stiff yellow prickles.</p>	<p>Leaves are a distinctive pale blue-green colour.</p> <p>All parts of the plant are toxic to humans and animals.</p>	<p>Single flowers at the end of branchlets with 4 - 6 cream-pale yellow coloured petals about 6cm across.</p>	<p>Fruit are shiny blue-green capsules, covered in rigid spines, opening at the top to expose seeds. Each capsule contains up to 400 seeds. Seeds are brown or black, globular in shape and 1.5mm in diameter.</p>

Mexican poppy is declared a Class B (control) and Class C (not to be introduced) weed in the Northern Territory. Mexican poppy is a declared weed in accordance with the *Weeds Management Act*.

### The problem

Infestations of Mexican poppy are now well established throughout a number of inland river systems in Central Australia. The feasibility of control in the majority of these areas is no longer a viable option due to the high costs of control and the ongoing maintenance required for these often dense and extensive infestations. The predominant means of seed dispersal for established infestations is via floodwaters. The highly dynamic nature of ephemeral river systems in central Australia greatly aids the spread of the species along catchments particularly during flood events.

The impacts on amenity values within infested areas are often high as infestations reduce the natural values of creeks and rivers. Tourism, camping and recreational use of creeks and rivers is affected by the nuisance properties of the plants. The impacts on biodiversity values from Mexican poppy are considered to be minimal in Central Australia as in the majority of cases the plants are confined to sandy riverbeds where there is little else in the way of native plant species growing.

The most immediate threat of spread is associated with the inadvertent transport of viable seed in river sand extracted from the numerous sand mining extraction licences established in the Todd River and Roe Creek as well as the points of sale of river sand used primarily for construction and back filling.

## Habitat and distribution

Mexican poppy, a native of Central America, is now found throughout Australia. It is widespread throughout Central Australia where it has been present for over 20 years.

The species preference is for subtropical and semi-arid climates where it can grow on a wide range of soil types, particularly those which are able to retain a high moisture content during the summer. In Central Australia the preferred habitat for the species is within the bare sandy river beds of ephemeral river systems where there is often little competition from native pasture species and where the plants are able to take advantage of high moisture levels associated with the shallow aquifers in these areas.

## Preventing spread of Mexican poppy

Spread prevention is the most successful and cost effective way of managing weeds. Mexican poppy is able to germinate at all times of the year in Australia providing there is sufficient moisture available. Young plants often form a rosette during the winter and flower throughout summer. Plants are able to produce massive amounts of seed (up to 400 per pod and 20,000 per plant) contained in large pods, when pods ripen the black oily seeds fall close to the base of the parent plant.

Mexican poppy seeds are able to attach to fur on animals, and to clothing, footwear and machinery. The inadvertent spread of seed from contaminated river systems to clean areas takes place primarily through the transport of contaminated river sand used for construction and back filling purposes.

## Mexican poppy control

### Chemical control

Chemical control of large infestations prior to seeding is an option for control.

Chemical and concentration	Rate	Situation, method and comments
<b>2, 4-D amine 625 g/L</b> Various trade names	320 ml / 100 L	<b>Seedling or Adult (individuals or infestation)</b> Foliar spray - apply when actively growing
<b>Glyphosate 360 g/L</b> Various trade names and formulations	10 ml / 1 L	<b>Seedling or Adult (individuals or infestation)</b> Foliar spray - apply when actively growing
<b>MCPA 340 g/L + Dicamba 80 g/L</b> Various trade names	350 ml / 100 L	<b>Seedling or Adult (individuals or infestation)</b> Foliar spray

### Optimum treatment times – Darker colours represent preferred months for foliar treatment.

Jan	Feb	March	April	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
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### Non-chemical control

Mexican poppy is an annual plant and therefore all measures to control it must aim to limit the production and dispersal of seed. Seeds remain dormant in the soil for up to seven years so eradication requires regular follow up control for several years.

For smaller isolated infestations of immature plants, hand pulling or grubbing using a mattock or hoe is an effective means of control for plants which have not yet seeded.

Control efforts should target infestations prior to development of mature (dry/brown) seed pods. Any disturbance to seeding plants may result in unintentional seed spread.

### **Follow up**

It is vital that follow up monitoring and treatment is carried out to control seedling recruitment and regrowth after a site has been treated. If left uncontrolled, seedlings and regrowth may develop into a bigger problem than the initial infestation.

### **Disclaimer**

In the Northern Territory, a registered product must only be used in situations consistent to those appearing on the label, unless authorised under a permit; and a person:

- must not have in their possession or use a chemical product unless the product is registered in Australia (exemptions apply)
- may use a registered product at a concentration, rate or frequency lower than that specified on the label unless this is specifically prohibited on the label. This does not apply to herbicide use occurring under an Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority (APVMA) permit
- may use a registered product to control a pest not specified on the label provided the pest is in a situation that is on the label and use on that pest is not specifically prohibited on the label
- may also use a registered product using a method not specified on the label unless this is specifically prohibited on the label.

Users of agricultural (or veterinary) chemical products must always read the label and any permit, before using the product and strictly comply with the directions on the label and any conditions of any permit. Users are not absolved from compliance with the directions on the label or conditions of the permit by reason of any statement made in or omission from this publication.

### **Further information**

Weed Management Officers from the Weed Management Branch can provide advice on all aspects of weed management including control techniques, biological control, legislative responsibilities, policy advice, monitoring and reporting and regional planning.

For further information on weed management planning, integrated control, herbicide application techniques and monitoring please refer to the [NT Weed Management Handbook](#).