

Controlling Colombian waxweed (*Cuphea carthagenensis*) in pastures

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Colombian waxweed invading a pasture, Coraki NSW



Background

Colombian waxweed is also known commonly as *Cuphea* on the NSW far north coast.

It is a member of the Lythraceae plant family, and is an introduced species from tropical America that has naturalised from the NSW far north coast to Bundaberg in QLD.

It was first documented as being naturalised at Murwillumbah in the early 1970's. Colombian waxweed has continued to spread and now is a very common weed of pastures and native vegetation in moist areas such as floodplains, swamps, drains and waterways.

Colombian waxweed can form very dense populations in pastures rapidly, leading to the loss of preferable pasture species and significant reductions in stocking rates. It is not listed as being toxic to cattle, however, cattle are reluctant to eat it and have been seen to lose excessive body condition when Colombian waxweed dominates a pasture sward.

Description

Colombian waxweed is a short lived upright plant that can reach 60cm tall, however most are below 40cm. The stems are green or red in colour and are covered densely in sticky hairs. Leaves are small 5 – 25mm wide and 10 – 60mm long, oval shaped with pointed tips, they occur in pairs along the stems, and can appear on very small stalks or may seem stalk-less.

Flowers are a pinkish purple either singly or in small clusters at the leaf forks or tips of branches. The flowers have a green or reddish tube 4-7mm long at the base and are topped with 6 petals 1-2mm long.

Close up of stem, leaves and flower



Seeds are in very small capsules up to 5mm wide and are contained in the tubular flower base, while the seed is green the tube splits to expose them, the cluster of 4 -8 contained seeds quickly turn brown and are shed soon afterwards.

Reproduction and dispersal

Seed is the only way Colombian waxweed reproduces. In low lying country seed is spread widely by flooding. Within a paddock or between paddocks livestock movement and machinery are the most common forms of transferring seed.

Pasture invasion

Colombian waxweed, like many weeds, is an opportunist and will quickly invade degraded pastures or areas of disturbance. Often the first sightings will be along drainage lines or around stock camps.

Over-grazed pastures are at high risk of invasion following a flooding event, recently mulched or slashed pastures can suffer some moderate invasion after flooding but it depends on how short the pasture was cut and length of time the pasture was inundated.

The upright growth habit of Colombian waxweed allows it to compete with dominant pasture species such as *Setaria* and even Couch on the floodplains. Couch based pastures offer the most resistance to invasion due to their dense mat forming growth habit, but if the Colombian waxweed plant does become established, it quickly grows above the Couch and begins to out compete it.

Figure 3: Upright growth habit of Colombian waxweed allows it to compete well with pastures like *Setaria*



Control

In pasture situations with dense infestations, chemical control is the most effective and practical method of control.

In NSW only, there is a new off label APVMA Permit (PER82650) which includes a range of selective

and nonselective herbicides. These can be applied as boom or spot spray applications in accordance with the permit instructions to control Colombian waxweed in pastures.

The Permit can be accessed at the link below or the APVMA Website <http://permits.apvma.gov.au/PER82650.PDF>

Unless otherwise stated in the permit (PER82650) use of any of the products in the Permit must be in accordance with the instructions on the product label.

Isolated plants can be hand pulled, bagged and disposed of appropriately.

Slashing and mulching offer very limited control and can actually spread seed further as the sticky waxy coating of Colombian waxweed results in seed sticking to the machinery and being spread further. Colombian waxweed can also tolerate being cut short with repeated slashing or mulching to reduce seed set also likely to reduce persistence of desirable pasture species.

Cultivation offers some limited control but often in low lying areas or in permanent pasture cultivation is seldom appropriate.

Always read 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 the conditions of any Permit. Users are not absolved from compliance with the directions on the label or the conditions of the Permit by reason of any statement made or omitted to be made in this Factsheet.

Users of agricultural (or veterinary) chemical products in NSW are required to be trained in their use in accordance with the Pesticides Regulation 2009.

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