

Innocent Weed

(*Cenchrus longispinus* and *Cenchrus incertus*)

July 2017



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Innocent Weed species (*Cenchrus longispinus* and *C. incertus*) are fast-growing annual grasses that produce spiny burrs. Innocent weed is a pest plant in pastures and irrigated crops.

Innocent Weed species are declared weed under the *Natural Resources Management Act 2004* (NRM Act).

Description

Innocent Weed is an erect or spreading summer-growing grass that grows up to 60 cm high. The fibrous root system is generally shallow but can extend to depths of 30 cm.

New plants germinate from late winter to early summer. Summer rainfall can promote continued germination. Plants can flower less than a month after germination.

The stems radiate from the base and are hairless and flattened. Roots form where stem nodes contact the soil.

Leaves grow to a length of 20 cm with a width of 5–8 mm. The leaves are smooth with fine serrations.

The flower heads are 3–8 cm long and are produced from October to January.

Fruiting bodies are produced from December to April. They are clusters of straw coloured burrs with barbed, purplish spines. Individual plants produce up to 1000 egg-shaped seeds which can remain dormant for up to 3 years.

Most plants die in autumn or winter, but in a mild winter some may survive and produce a further crop of burrs in spring.

Impacts

Innocent Weed is a pest of pastures and irrigated horticulture crops. The burrs can injure the mouth and gut of stock and it can become a problem in summer irrigated crops like lucerne as it can contaminate fodder hay.

It contaminates wool and can cause injury to shearers and wool handlers. The burrs impact on dried fruit by making handling more difficult and contaminating produce.

In heavily infested areas, Innocent Weed can prevent the use of working dogs.

It can infest urban areas on footpaths, bare streetscapes and recreation grounds, particularly where there is summer moisture and little competition.

Innocent Weed is not a significant pest of the major broadacre crops.



Distribution

Innocent Weed originates from North America.

In the Mount Lofty Ranges Innocent Weed has a limited distribution. It is found mainly in sandy soils where there is little competition from established plants. Infestations are most likely where vehicles, stock, fodder and camping equipment provide sources of contamination.

It is a problem in recreational areas, vineyards and roadsides, particularly where summer moisture contributes to growth. Innocent Weed is a significant pest in the vineyards of Barossa, McLaren Vale and Blewitt Springs.

Control methods / invasiveness

Herbicide is generally effective in controlling Innocent Weed in irrigated and horticultural crops. Because the plant germinates opportunistically, repeat treatments may be needed during the growing season.

Maintenance of competitive pasture species can be effective in excluding innocent weed.

Small and isolated patches of innocent weed can be easily grubbed out.

Good hygiene practices for the movement of stock, hay, seed, produce and machinery greatly reduce the possibility of new infestations.

For advice on chemical control techniques contact your nearest Natural Resources Centre. Please refer to the *Weed control handbook for declared plants in South Australia* for advice on chemical control. You can find it on Biosecurity SA's website at www.pir.sa.gov.au

Declarations

The following sections of the NRM Act apply to Innocent Weed in the Adelaide and Mount Lofty Ranges region:

- 175 (2) Cannot transport the plant or anything carrying it**
- 177 (1) Cannot sell the plant**
- 177 (2) Cannot sell any produce / goods carrying the plant**
- 182 (2) Landowner must control the plant on their land**
- 185 (1) NRM authority may recover costs for control of weeds on roadsides from adjoining landowners**

More information

Please contact your local Natural Resources Centre for further information, advice and assistance in controlling Innocent Weed.

Black Hill

115 Maryvale Road, Athelstone 5076

T: 08 8336 0901

Gawler

8 Adelaide Road, Gawler South 5118

T: 08 8523 7700

Willunga

5 Aldinga Road, Willunga 5172

T: 08 8550 3400