

Invasive plants and animals

Bellyache bush

Jatropha gossypifolia

DECLARED CLASS 2



Description

Bellyache bush (*Jatropha gossypifolia*) is often confused with castor oil plant (*Ricinus communis*). Both plants are frequently found in the same areas.

Bellyache bush is a squat, thick-stemmed shrub 2.5–4 m tall developing from a short, single stemmed plant with three or four young leaves sprouting from the top. Young leaves are deeply divided into three rounded lobes, and are purple coloured and sticky. Older leaves are bright green, about 10 cm in diameter, and may have up to five

lobes, the edges covered in coarse, dark brown hairs.

The flowers are small, red with yellow centres, and are in small clusters throughout the upper part of the plant. Seed pods are smooth and oval, about the size of a cherry, 12 mm across and contain three to four seeds about 8 mm long.

Castor oil plant is similar but usually taller than bellyache bush. The leaves are larger and clearly different, with more lobes (seven to nine) which are much more pointed. Flowers and fruit are on an obvious spike near the top of the plant. Fruit are covered with soft spines and are 2.5 cm across, much larger than those on bellyache bush.

Distribution and habitat

A native of tropical America, bellyache bush is sometimes grown as a garden plant. It has escaped and become naturalised in various areas of north Queensland and has been declared a noxious weed by many shire councils. A number of smaller infestations occur throughout the remainder of Queensland. It is usually common along riverbanks and roadsides.

The problem

It is generally acknowledged that the shallow root system and canopy cover of bellyache bush precludes growth of other plants, often outcompeting native vegetation and reducing pasture growth. Dense infestations may occur on river flats and other areas of good, loamy soil. It has taken over extensive sections of river frontage in several locations reducing biodiversity and increasing mustering costs.

The fruits of the plant are poisonous to humans and animals. The toxic substance is a toxalbumin which, when eaten, leads to symptoms of gastro-enteritis and eventual death of some animals. There have been many stock deaths reported due to bellyache bush poisoning mainly in times of severe drought.

Control

Mechanical

As bellyache bush is shallow-rooted, grubbing the plant by hand is effective. Repeated slashing of infested areas will help reduce density.

Fire

High kill rates using fire have been observed in the field, but only when there is a sufficient fuel load to carry a fire through a bellyache bush infestation.

Chemical

Two herbicides are currently registered for bellyache bush, and are listed in the table below. Testing by Tropical Weeds Research Centre staff has shown several others to be effective against this plant; they have been submitted for registration.

Further information

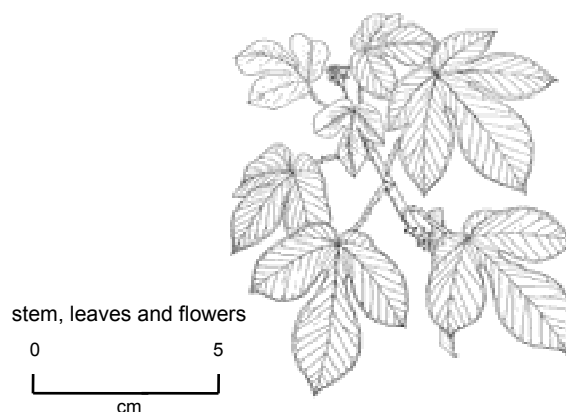
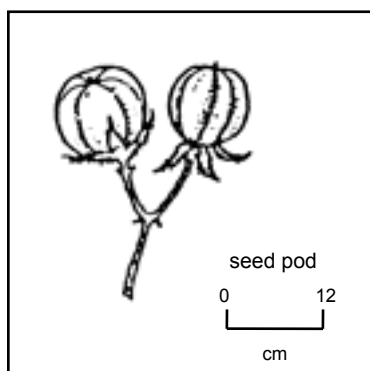
Further information is available from the vegetation management/weed control/environmental staff at your local government.

Further information

Bellyache bush is a declared Class 2 plant under the *Land Protection (Pest and Stock Route Management) Act 2002*. It is the responsibility of landholders to control this plant on land under their control.

TABLE 1 – HERBICIDES REGISTERED FOR THE CONTROL OF BELLYACHE BUSH

Herbicide/Trade name	Rate	Remarks
Metsulfuron/Brushoff	10 g/100 L plus wetting agent	Thoroughly wet plants and apply when actively growing for best results
Fluroxypyr/Starane 200	500 mL/100 L plus wetting agent	Thoroughly wet plants and apply when actively growing for best results



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