

ALLIGATOR WEED

Alternanthera philoxeroides

Management programme

Exclusion	Eradication	Progressive containment	Sustained control	Site-led
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Impacts

Economic	Biodiversity	Soil resources	Water quantity/quality
Human health	Social and cultural wellbeing	Amenity/recreation	Animal welfare

Objectives

To contain and where practicable progressively reduce the geographic distribution or extent of alligator weed within the Waikato region to pre-2022 levels.

Why is it a pest?

Alligator weed is one of the world's worst weeds. This fast-growing weed can grow both on land and in water, where it forms floating mats. It can also tolerate certain amounts of seawater when growing in flowing water. Alligator weed is a native of South America and was accidentally introduced to New Zealand in the 1880s in ballast water discarded from ships. It has since spread through much of Northland and is now found in several parts of the Waikato region.

In the Waikato, alligator weed is found in the Waikato River, on several farms, in market gardens and on urban properties. It's also in the Ruahorehore Stream near Waihi. Alligator weed has become a significant problem in new subdivisions in Hamilton. Although stock will eat it, alligator weed is actually toxic and can cause blindness and other health problems.

Alligator weed spreads aggressively from even the smallest stem fragments. It can double in area in less than two months. Alligator weed threatens farms, market gardens and urban properties (often dominating lawns). It clogs waterways and drains, increasing sedimentation and flooding risk. Access to waterways for recreational purposes (boating, fishing) can be blocked, and plants may affect whitebait spawning areas. It can out-compete pastures and crops, affecting farm production and profit.

Although stock will eat it, alligator weed is actually toxic and can cause blindness and other health problems. The agricultural sector is at increasing risk of alligator weed infestation due to movement of crops and agricultural contracting equipment. Farm owners are urged to have a weed hygiene plan in place to minimise the risk of invasion from alligator weed and other serious pest plants.

Responsibility for control

Waikato Regional Council is responsible for the control of alligator weed within the Waikato region. If you think you've seen it, call us – don't try to control it yourself.

- Occupiers are encouraged to report suspected sightings of alligator weed (rule ALW-1 of the **Waikato Regional Pest Management Plan 2022-2032**) and liaise with the council in areas where control programmes are in place.
- If alligator weed is present on a property that is to be subdivided or developed, there are additional rules and requirements that apply under section 6.6.

Alligator weed is banned from being sold, propagated, distributed, or included in commercial displays.

What does it look like?

Alligator weed can be difficult to identify. It is a low-growing, herbaceous perennial which is easy to confuse with two other similar-looking plants that can occur in similar habitats: water primrose (*Ludwigia peploides*) and willow weed (*Persicaria maculosa*). Alligator weed has long horizontal stems (stolons), up to 10m long, that are hollow and often reddish in colour. Coverage can be very compact when growing in clumps on land but more expansive when growing as floating mats on water.



Flower

- Clusters of papery white clover-like flowers.
- Flowers from December to March.

Fruit/seed

- No fruit or seeds are produced in New Zealand. Instead, alligator weed easily establishes and spreads aggressively from even the smallest stem fragments.



Leaves/stems

- Dark green waxy leaves, in opposite pairs.
- Pink-reddish, soft, hollow stems (<10m long) that root at nodes.

Restricted places

Under the Biosecurity Act 1993, Waikato Regional Council has declared “restricted place” notices at sites where there is a high risk of alligator weed from being spread. Landowners and occupiers must not remove alligator weed or any other material which may have come in contact with alligator weed from the place to which the notice relates; or introduce any goods of any kind to the place. A breach of a restricted place notice can have very severe consequences such as fines and/or imprisonment as outlined by the Biosecurity Act 1993.

Restricted place notices for alligator weed have been issued to private land in the region. Please contact Waikato Regional Council for more information about these sites.

You can help prevent the spread

Alligator weed can be easily spread by water movement (like floods or tides), soil movement and by equipment such as diggers, farm machinery, eel nets and boats. When disturbed, alligator weed plants break up easily into small fragments which can readily regrow. Take special care to not disturb it or transport it to new sites.

- Check boats, trailers, vehicles and equipment for fragments before heading home.
- Check drains on your property regularly.

Farmers should protect their properties from alligator weed and other serious pest plants. Insist all contractors practise good weed hygiene and clean their equipment before entering the farm.

- Make sure supplementary feed brought onto the farm is weed free.
- Make sure any aggregates, soil or sand brought onto the farm is weed free.



Uzi is an alligator weed scent dog who works in the Waikato.



Similar plants

Similar plants which are often mistaken for alligator weed are primrose willow and willow weed.



Primrose willow (*Ludwigia peploides*)



Primrose willow (*Ludwigia peploides*)

More information

Advice

For advice and additional information on control methods, call our pest plant staff on freephone 0800 800 401.

Chemical company representatives, farm supply stores, garden centres or the Weedbusters website can also be good sources for advice.

Publications

The following publications are available from the Waikato Regional Council. Contact us to request a copy (freephone 0800 800 401).

- National Pest Plant Accord (manual of plants banned from sale, propagation and distribution) (free)
- Plant Me Instead! (Plants to use in place of pest plants) (free)

Web

- *Waikato Regional Pest Management Plan 2022-2032* – waikatoregion.govt.nz/RPMP
- *Waikato Biosecurity Strategy 2022-2032* – waikatoregion.govt.nz/biosecurity-strategy