



AVON (Cunderdin, Dowerin, Goomalling, Northam, Tammin, Toodyay, Quairading, Wyalkatchem & York)

COTTON BUSH

Narrow-leaf cotton bush (*Gomphocarpus fruticosus*) is an erect slender short-lived shrub 1-2 metres high, with narrow opposite leaves, and bladder-like fruit. All parts of the plant exude a milky white sap when damaged. It reproduces by seed and suckers. It invades run down or low fertility pastures where it displaces useful species such as clover. Narrow-leaf cotton bush and its close relatives contain cardiac glycosides, which are toxic to humans and livestock. Stock wouldn't normally eat the plant because its acrid latex makes it extremely unpalatable but it may cause problems as a contaminant of hay or chaff. The main symptom of narrow-leaf cotton bush poisoning is severe gastroenteritis, which shows up as severe congestion of the alimentary canal. It also invades riparian areas where it competes with native plants.

Narrow-leaf cotton bush is a declared plant (noxious weed) throughout Western Australia and declared as a P4 plant across the Avon district. This means that the infested are must be managed in such a way that prevents the spread of seed or plant parts within and from the property on or in livestock, fodder, grain, vehicles and/or machinery.

◆ What to look for

Narrow-leaf cotton bush is a shrub growing up to two metres in height. It can form dense thickets covering many hectares. The opposite leaves are 6–18 mm wide and 5–12.5 cm long. The creamy white flowers are about 1 cm across and have a short corolla tube. The flowers form in drooping clusters from October to April. The distinctive seed pods are puffy, swan-shaped structures up to six centimetres long and covered in soft spines. It could be confused with balloon cotton bush, which also reaches two metres in height, but has more rounded seed pods.

◆ Life cycle

Narrow-leaf cotton bush spreads by seeds, which usually germinate in spring or autumn, but can germinate at any time in warm, moist conditions. Seedlings have the ability to resprout from the crown or root if the above ground parts of the plant are damaged. The plants grow through summer and usually flower in the second year from October to April.

◆ REPORTING

Report suspected cotton bush or any other unusual weeds as soon as possible. In country areas, contact the nearest office of the Department of Agriculture and Food, or call the Pest and Disease Information Service on Free call 1800 084 881.

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◆ What you can do about Cotton Bush

Practice good biosecurity to avoid introducing narrow-leaf cotton bush or other weeds and pests to your property. Do not cultivate narrow-leaf cotton bush as a garden plant and avoid purchasing soil or other landscaping supplies that could be contaminated with weed seeds or bulbs. If you have narrow-leaf cotton bush on your property, take care to prevent it spreading to other properties. Control small infestations before they spread. Join forces with your neighbours and local government authority to remove cotton bush and other weeds. It has a shallow root system so small infestations can be dealt with by hand pulling. Destroy any seeds in a way to avoid spreading the plant. Larger infestations are best dealt with by a combination of spraying, slashing, burning and pasture management. Ploughed firebreaks can provide an ideal seedbed for narrow-leaf cotton bush and other weeds, so chemical firebreaks may be better.



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