



Government
of South Australia

WEED IDENTIFICATION NOTES

ANIMAL AND PLANT CONTROL COMMISSION

BATHURST BURR



Closeup of leaves and burrs



Mature Bathurst burr plant

BATHURST BURR



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Bathurst burr, *Xanthium spinosum*, is a spiny annual weed introduced from South America. Successful control requires treatment of seedlings and the following staggered germinations. It is therefore important to keep Bathurst burr off clean properties or to recognise and destroy new infestations before they become established.

Distribution

Eyre Peninsula	- isolated plants, especially after rain
Northern pastoral	- very common but decreasing further north
Northern ag districts / Yorke Peninsula	- widespread
Murray Mallee	- scattered infestations
South East	- scattered with some large infestations
Central region	- scattered

Impacts

Burrs of Bathurst burr contaminate wool, adding to the cost of handling and processing the wool as well as the final cost of the woollen product. Spines of this plant also cause physical damage to stock, people and shearing machinery. Bathurst burr competes strongly with summer crops and is host for horticultural diseases.

Seedlings are poisonous to most stock animals, the toxin being hydroquinone. Symptoms include nausea, vomiting, depression and weakness. Death may occur within hours or days.

In South America Bathurst burr has been used for medicine and dye.

Recognition

Bathurst burr is an erect, densely branched annual herb to 1m high with a branched taproot. The upper surface of leaves are dark green and shiny, while the underside of leaves are pale green and downy. Leaves are 7cm long and usually have 3 lobes. At the base of each leaf, 3-pronged yellow spines occur that are 1.5-2.5cm long. Bathurst burr has small, creamy green flowers at the end of stems and also at leaf nodes. The fruit of this plant is the burr which is straw coloured and oblong in shape. The burr is 1-1.5cm long and 4-5mm wide, densely covered with numerous hooked spines. Each burr contains two seeds that are flat, black and about 1cm long.

Biology

Bathurst burr prefers highly fertile disturbed soil and is often found near watercourses, dams and flood plains. Staggered germinations occur after late spring or summer rains or irrigation. Bathurst burr grows quickly in warm weather and burrs are formed in February and continue for several months. Newly germinated plants can produce burrs at only a few weeks of age. Most plants die in early winter but in Australia seeds can germinate out of season and mature plants can be found at any time of the year.

The hooked spines on the burrs are well adapted for dispersal on animals by clinging to wool and fur. The burrs are easily carried on clothing, packaging and water, and may also contaminate summer crops.

Further Information :

Parsons, W.T. & Cuthbertson, E.G. (2000). *Noxious Weeds of Australia*. 2nd edn. Inkata Press.

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For more advice on recognising and controlling Bathurst burr, contact your local Animal and Plant Control Board :



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