

ST JOHN'S WORT

(Hypericum perforatum)



Jackie Miles/Max Campbell

Weed: St John's wort



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Why is St John's wort a weed?

- Extremely invasive in native grassland and woodlands, road verges and other waste ground
- Grows to dominate pasture, severely reducing carrying capacity
- Poisonous to stock (causes photosensitisation resulting in itchy, raw faces and mouth and prevents feeding)
- A single plant can produce up to 30,000 seeds per year and they can remain viable for up to 12 years
- Tolerates frost and drought

Description

Plant: perennial herb, 30-120cm high, dies back to the rootstock/rosettes over winter and does not begin growing again until early summer, one or more hairless stems per plant with branches in opposite pairs

Leaves: small, green, hairless, to 3cm long with a paler underside and prominent mid-vein, in opposite pairs, attached to stem without a stalk, when held up to light, tiny clear oil dots can be seen

Seeds: tiny (1mm long), contained in small brown papery capsules

Flowers: bright yellow, during summer, five-petalled, 2cm diameter, multiple stamens grouped into three clusters at the base

Fruit: sticky, brown, three-celled capsule that splits open on ripening in summer to release 30-70 seeds in the following autumn and winter

Dispersal via

- Regeneration via suckering from the roots, hence the problem being compounded via poorly planned cultivation
- Seeds attach to animal and vehicles and are spread from place to place
- Seed spread in contaminated soil, hay or chaff

Status

St John's wort is listed as a class 3 noxious weed in Queanbeyan and Palerang Council areas. The plant must be fully and continuously suppressed and destroyed. In the Cooma-Monaro Shire Council it is listed as a class 4 noxious weed and the growth and spread of the plant must be controlled in accordance with local management plans published by the council.

In the ACT, St John's wort is a class 3 pest plant which must be contained.



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Look-alikes

Native plants can often be confused with weed species. The following information aims to assist you with accurate identification to prevent the loss of our declining natives. If you are unsure what species you are dealing with, take advantage of the identification services on offer from your local weeds officer (either at your local council or the ACT's Parks, Conservation and Lands) before carrying out any controls.

There a number of other similar plants, some of which are natives and should not be removed and some of which are also weeds. The native **small St John's wort** (*Hypericum gramineum*) is a common herb in grassy woodland. It can be differentiated by its flowers which are smaller than in St John's wort, reaching a diameter of 5-10mm. **Tutsan** (*H. androsaemum*) is an occasional garden escapee in neighbouring areas. It has similar but much larger leaves and flowers with black berries. It prefers moist shady sites and can become a serious weed. It has been declared noxious in some areas of Victoria.

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Native: small St John's wort

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Control methods

For advice on what time of year to implement the following management options, see the Molonglo Catchment Weed Control Calendar. Preventing infestations is the priority. Prevent contaminated animals, machinery, soil and hay from entering your property.

Hand pulling or digging small infestations is only suitable if ALL the roots are removed as it regrows readily from roots left behind. Digging or using a hoe can break the roots so care must be taken and persistence with follow up control is required. Any plants and roots removed must be disposed of carefully. Plants can also be spot sprayed. For large infestations boom spray, or cultivate and establish desirable, competitive species in their place. Avoid overgrazing and maintain good ground cover to discourage establishment. Control rabbits as they help create suitable conditions for growth of St John's wort. Grazing by mature goats or sheep, if timed appropriately, can be safe and effective.

Seek advice on chemical application from your Council Weeds Officer or local 'bush friendly' nursery. Always use chemicals as directed on the label. Due to the persistent nature of this weed it is advised that you contact your local weeds officer for detailed control advice.

A range of biological controls have been released to help control St John's wort including an aphid, mite, root borer, leaf-feeding beetle and gall fly. The mite has had the most significant impact on the weed. The majority of these biological controls are widespread in NSW and there is no need for redistribution.