



NSW DEPARTMENT OF
PRIMARY INDUSTRIES

Weed Alert

HAVE YOU SEEN THIS PLANT?

Knapweed

(*Centaurea* spp.)



Spotted knapweed – single flower head

A prohibited import found in NSW

WORLD STATUS

- The knapweeds – genus *Centaurea* – have over 500 species, most originating in eastern Europe. Many are commonly grown in the garden – such as the cornflowers – without risk of weediness. However, others are noxious weeds both in Australia and overseas.
- Spotted knapweed, *C. maculosa*, is a major pastoral weed world wide, particularly in North America where it infests millions of hectares.
- Black knapweed, *C. nigra*, is already a serious noxious weed of crops in Victoria.
- Star thistle, *C. calcitrapa*, and St Barnaby's thistle, *C. solstitialis*, have been declared noxious in various local government areas of NSW and Victoria for many years, as pests of pastures and roadsides.

Only one infestation of *C. maculosa* is known in Australia. This infestation is on the Murrumbidgee River in the ACT.

QUARANTINE CONSIDERATIONS

Many *Centaurea* species are prohibited imports into Australia. The *Noxious Weeds Act 1993* also prohibits the sale of



Black knapweed – single flower head – note thickened stem below flower

spotted and black knapweeds in NSW, as they have been declared as Class 1 noxious weeds. The presence of the weed on land must be notified to the local control authority and the weed 'must be eradicated from the land and the land must be kept free of the plant.' In addition, the plants must not be sold, propagated or knowingly distributed.

Authorised Council Weeds Officers have the power to destroy plants and issue fines if plants are found on premises.

Visit our website: www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/weeds

THE PROBLEM

Plants can be spread by seed and by pieces of root during cultivation. The plants are not readily eaten by livestock and compete with useful pastures, possibly with allelopathic effects. That is, by producing chemicals these plants suppress growth of other species. This in turn reduces the carrying capacity of the land.

IDENTIFICATION



The knapweeds can be annuals, short- or long-lived perennials. They germinate in autumn and overwinter as rosettes.

Knapweeds are unlike other thistle species such as St. Barnaby's thistle and star thistle because their leaves have no spines.

Two new incursions of this genus have been identified in NSW.

- Spotted knapweed, *C. maculosa* is a short-lived perennial herb. The leaf margins are deeply indented or divided nearly to the main rib and have no spines. The slender flower stems grow up to 1 m high bearing single pinkish-purple flowers at the tips. Seedheads are small, about 5–7 mm diameter. The seedhead bracts have blackened tips giving a spotted appearance.
- Black knapweed, *C. nigra* is a perennial herb growing up to 1 m high. The basal leaves are oval-shaped, not indented and have no spines. The seedheads are solitary, about 15 mm in diameter with purple florets. The seedhead bracts are dark brown to black. The stem immediately below the seedhead is thickened.

PROPAGATION

Black knapweed has been promoted as an ornamental garden species in the UK and North America. In NSW it has been sold on several occasions as an ornamental species. Plants can produce from 1000 to 18 000 seeds which may be transported by wind, water, animals, people and vehicles. They will grow on most soil types, especially in disturbed areas, and are strong competitors, exerting an allelopathic effect on surrounding grasses and trees.

CONTROL

Plants should be reported to your local Council Weeds Officer and removed by hand before seeding.

JJ Dellow & S Johnson NSW DPI
(Photographs: JJ Dellow)

Watch out for and report knapweeds.

Knapweeds could be introduced as garden ornamentals. If you have seen these plants, please report them to your Council Weeds Officer or NSW Department of Primary Industries.



Spotted knapweed rosette (leaves deeply indented)

Black knapweed rosette (leaves oval-shaped)



FOR MORE INFORMATION:

Contact your local council weeds officer or district agronomist, or telephone the NSW Department of Primary Industries Hotline on 1800 680 244



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