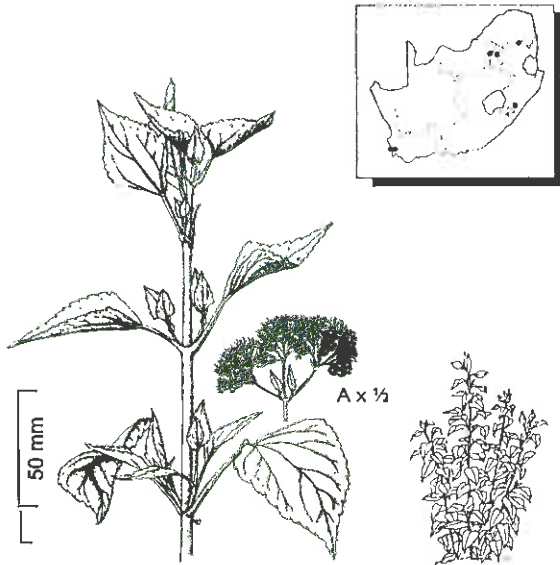


BEWARE: Stop the MEXICAN DEVIL WEED from taking over the Magaliesberg kloofs!



The Mexican Devil weed (crofton weed; *Ageratina adenophora*) has been making its appearance in the past five years in various Magaliesberg kloofs near water and next to streams with a major infestation in Easter Kloof. Before being noted as a weed in South Africa, the plant assumed serious weed status in Hawaii, Australia, New Zealand, China and in India. Recently it was noted as having formed large thickets in the foothills of the Himalayas, in Nepal. It is believed to be primarily a garden escape.

Please make sure that you are able to recognise this weed - pull it out and report any findings! In 2001 the plant was declared an invasive plant, Category 1, under the Conservation of Agricultural Resources Act, which means that by law it has to be removed.

Some biocontrol measures are currently in place in various countries. In the Northern Province (Tzaneen area), KwaZulu-Natal and the Western Cape, host-specific gall flies and a leaf-spot fungus from Mexico are being released, but these are not expected to be able to control the weed in our area. Because of low priority on a national scale (but not so for the Magaliesberg and for other inland mountain ranges!), research funding for more destructive, effective natural enemies (insects or diseases from the areas of origin) has not been forthcoming.

RECOMMENDED MEASURES: Manual removal. When there are sparse plants and dense infestations, control efforts should be concentrated on the sparse plants first, as these could rapidly develop into more dense stands. Dense stands will hardly get denser, and could be left for last while biocontrol agents may be multiplying in them, even though they will be a source of seeds. If dense infestations are too much to handle properly at once (removing each shoot from under soil level as it will resprout if broken off and not entirely removed), cutting the flower stalks before the seeds are shed in early summer and putting them in closed plastic bags until decomposed will at least reduce the copious seed production. Seeds are readily dispersed by wind over long distances, and also by water.

Spotspray where plants cannot be removed manually and where there are large infestations. Use only formulations of 'glyphosate' or 'glyphosate trimesium' (non-selective) sold under various trade names, at doses and as recommended on the label for use against broadleaved weeds and noxious plants in non-agricultural, municipal and industrial situations. ALWAYS ADHERE STRICTLY TO LABEL INSTRUCTIONS. If the use of a selective herbicide is required, use a formulation of Triclopyr Ester (480g/l EC) under the conditions as mentioned.

Follow-up work over several years is essential in any cleared areas, because of the dense regeneration from seeds in the soil. Overseeding with seeds of pioneer grasses of the area will probably be an essential part of rehabilitating any areas cleared of dense infestations (manually or with the judicious use of chemicals) unless rigorous follow-up clearing is practised annually. It is imperative to check all kloofs from top to bottom annually in order to be able to prevent the weed from forming seeds there. Plants may grow high up on damp, vertical cliffs.

Stefan Naser, Plant Protection Research Institute, Agricultural Research Council (Tel: 012-329 3274/69).

IDENTIFICATION: *Ageratina adenophora* (Asteraceae) - crofton weed / Mexican Devil weed

Description: Multistemmed, perennial herb or softly woody shrub up to 2m high; leaf-stalks and stems densely glandular-hairy and often reddish.

Leaves: Dark green; broad at the base, with a serrated edge and tapering to a sharp point; three-nerved from the base; always in opposite pairs; non-aromatic.

Flowers: White, in terminal clusters about 5mm long x 5mm wide, August to December.

Fruits: Straw-coloured elongated nutlets with a bristly crown of hairs, about 2mm long.

Originally cultivated for: Ornamental white flowerheads.

Invades: Roadsides, railsides and plantations, especially in damp places.

Origin: Central America.

Adapted from: 'Plant invaders of South Africa - a pocket field guide to the identification of 161 of the most important and potentially important alien species', Plant Protection Research Institute Handbook No 5, ARC, 1995, Lesley Henderson, p5.

Enquiries and reports of sightings to: The Mountain Club of South Africa (Johannesburg Section). Tel/Fax: (011) 807 1310

Published by the Mountain Club of South Africa (Magaliesberg Section), PO Box 1418, Pretoria 0002

Web: <http://mag.mcsa.org.za> E-mail: mcsamag@mcsa.org.za

Compiled by Petro Grabler, June 2002

Sponsored by the Department of Agriculture, Conservation, Environment and Land Affairs, Gauteng Province

