

Groundsel bush

(*Baccharis halimifolia*)

Regional priority weed objective: Containment

Groundsel bush is a native of the east coast of North America and the West Indies, and is widespread in many areas of Northern NSW.

By 1930, it was a serious weed in south-eastern Queensland. By the mid-1960s, it was present in the Tweed, Richmond and Clarence catchments in Northern NSW.

Since then, it has gradually spread southwards along the coastal fringe to the Taree area. It is likely that Groundsel bush will spread further in Australia.



As it invades bushland and forests, Groundsel bush is both an environmental weed and a forestry weed.

- Description:** A densely-branched shrub, usually between 1.5m and 3m high, although it sometimes grows into a small tree up to 7m high.
- Leaves:** Groundsel bush has wedge-shaped leaves, usually with a few large teeth towards the apex, up to about 5cm long and up to 4cm wide on a stalk to 1.5cm long. Leaves are dull or pale green, waxy to touch, and alternate. Stems are green at first but turn brown with age and have a characteristic striped bark.
- Flowers:** Numerous male and female flowers grow on separate plants. Male flowers are cream and occur in globular heads. Female flowers are white and grow in head clusters at the ends of branches. Flower heads to 5mm wide consist of several small flowers (florets): hair-like bristles of female florets grow to 12mm long; hair-like bristles of male florets to 4mm long.
- Dispersal:** Female plants are enveloped in white hairs during seeding. Groundsel bush flowers mostly in the autumn. Seeds are ribbed, hairless, to 1.7mm long with hair-like bristles at apex. Seeds are readily dispersed by wind.
- Habitat:** Found in humid warm-temperate to subtropical regions. It is mostly found in disturbed areas such as coastal swamps, degraded pastures and forests where the understorey has been removed.

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Declaration and control

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These weeds are widely distributed in parts of this region. While broadscale elimination is not practical, minimisation of the biosecurity risk posed by these weeds is reasonably practicable.

Control methods

Biological

In Australia, Groundsel bush does not suffer from predation by the range of natural enemies that are found in its native habitat. Biological control involves introducing these natural enemies to reduce its vigour and competitive ability. Six insects have established in Australia, three of which, a fly and two stem-boring agents, have had a minor impact on Groundsel bush in NSW. A rust fungus has also been released in NSW.

Biological control of Groundsel bush is only a management tool in core infestation areas. At this stage, biological control cannot be relied upon for short-term, comprehensive control; other techniques should be used, including chemical and mechanical means.

Chemical

Many chemicals are registered for use on Groundsel bush. See your local rural store for advice.

Mechanical

Small plants can be dug out, ensuring all roots are taken. Large plants will need to be cut down and poisoned. Apply poison directly on the stump immediately after making the cut. Slashing plants tends to make them multi stemmed and hardy.



Young Groundsel bush plants do not flower until their second year. The mature plant, above, is in full flower around late April.

Groundsel bush is easy to kill, so with consistent attention control is achievable.



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