

Alligator weed

Alternanthera philoxeroides

Family Amaranthaceae

Identification

- **Water weed** that creeps or floats on the water surface (stem tips grow upright)
- **Stems** are **hollow**, green or red-tinged (up to 10 m long)
- Bright green, **lance-shaped**, **waxy leaves** grow opposite along the stem
- **Fibrous roots**
- Small, white flowers (Dec–Feb) grouped in a single **clover-like flower head**, held up by a tiny stalk at the stem tip



Alligator weed. Photo: Environment Bay of Plenty.



Alligator weed showing fibrous roots, green stem and waxy, lance-shaped leaves. Photo: D. Mahon.

Control

Dig out small patches and dispose of appropriately. As alligator weed spreads by fragments, it is important to ensure that all the plant material is removed and follow-up visits are carried out to check for potential re-growth. For larger sites, ask a local territorial authority for advice on control measures. Prevent further spread of alligator weed by limiting soil and machinery movement from infested sites and thoroughly wash boats, trailers and fishing equipment of all aquatic material.

Status

Alligator weed is a MAF unwanted organism and is listed on the national plant pest accord as well. Therefore it is illegal to sell, propagate or distribute this species in New Zealand. Please contact the Potential Pest Line on (03) 363 9380 or email weeds@ecan.govt.nz if you suspect you have seen alligator weed.

Where is it a problem?

Alligator weed can be found growing in shallow, warm, fresh and/or brackish waters. It prefers stagnant, slow-moving streams, lagoons, drains, ponds and wetlands. It can also be found growing in pastureland, cropland, gardens and urban areas. In Canterbury it has been found in private gardens. Alligator weed will not root in water that is deeper than 2–3 metres but it can still form a floating mat, growing from the water's edge and extending over these depths.

Why is it a problem?

Tolerant of shade, drought and poor drainage, alligator weed grows rapidly to form dense mats of vegetation that completely cover the water surface. These dense mats prevent native plants from growing and degrade wetlands and waterways. It spreads by stem fragments, so the smallest piece broken from this plant can potentially re-sprout and grow elsewhere. Fragments can be spread by dumped vegetation as well as water, livestock, machinery, boats, fishing equipment and soil movement. No seed is produced in New Zealand.



Alligator weed invading a drain. Photo: Plant Protection Society.