

WEED FILE: CLEAVERS

REVISED: DECEMBER 2016



DESCRIPTION

Cleavers : *Galium aparine*

Cleavers is a scrambling annual plant that hooks onto any available support, so it can smother fencing and other plants including, alas, crops.

It's a plant that seems to be 'sticky' – the leaves, stems and seeds all give that impression, though it's not literally true. The stickiness actually comes from a covering of very fine hooks which act much like Velcro. As a result, the seeds of cleavers have an irresistible attraction for trouser legs, woollen socks, cats and dogs. Not unexpectedly, this is how this cunning plant spreads its seeds.

The stems are weak, and square in cross-section. They're just 2mm or so thick, but can extend to 2 metres or more in length, especially if they have found some host plant or structure to support them.

The individually slender leaves grow in whorls of about 6 to 8 leaves at intervals along the stem. And they're liberally armed with the tiny, clinging, 'sticky' hairs for which the cleavers plant is known.

The flowers are very small (2mm) and white, with four wee petals. They appear in small clusters of 2 to 5 (see the accompanying pictures). Flowering occurs from mid-winter through to mid-autumn.

The seeds are small (5mm) and tenaciously 'sticky' due to the covering of tiny hooks. Initially the seeds are green, becoming dark to black over summer.

Cleavers is very common throughout all of NZ. It is commonly found in crops, gardens and orchards, and neglected waste areas. In crops, cleavers can scramble over the erect crop plants, causing them to become top-heavy and fall over, especially with some wind assistance.

Cleavers is apparently eminently edible (young leaves and stems, after cooking). And the mature (dark) seeds can be roasted and ground to make a coffee substitute – for people who don't care what their 'coffee' tastes like, presumably.

PHYSICAL CONTROL

Hand removal is the preferred control method because cleavers is weak-stemmed and shallow-rooted, so it comes out easily.

Dispose of removed cleavers in a landfill.

HERBICIDE CONTROL

MCPA and 2,4-D are both very poor at dealing with cleavers.

Non-selective control

- **Glyphosate 360** at 100ml/10L water, or **Granny** at 45g/10L water will give decent control. Add **SprayWetter** at 10ml/10L water for best results and for reduced rain risk period.

Selective control - Pasture

- **Decision** at 50g/Ha gives good control of smaller cleavers plants, while being a grass and clover friendly treatment. Add **SprayWetter** at 100ml/100L water.

Selective control - Crops

The best option in crops is to use a spray containing *mecoprop* before the cleavers get too large. There are perhaps a few other options, but check with your supplier first because some specialist crop herbicides don't control cleavers well at all.

Orchards and Vineyards

- **GA200** at 1L/100L water applied by handgun or knapsack. Add 100ml **SprayWetter** per 100L water.