

WEED FILE: NETTLE



Urtica urens

DESCRIPTION

Nettle is an erect annual weed that is very commonly called stinging nettle because of the nasty sting it inflicts upon brushing contact with unprotected skin. This stinging sensation is actually the result of poisons being released by the fine bristles on the nettle's leaves.

Oddly enough, if you boldly seize the plant these bristles are often flattened before they can penetrate, and you don't get stung. Presumably that's the origin of the phrase "to seize the nettle". Stock tend to distrust this advice, because they will avoid grazing where nettle patches are present. The nettle plant grows up to about 50-60cm in height.

Leaves are dark green and heart shaped with distinctively jagged edges. Individual leaves are up to 8cm long and are arranged in opposite pairs on the stem. They are covered in fine stinging bristles. The stems are round in cross-section, and branched. The stems also have a covering of the same fine stinging bristles that are found on the leaves.

The flowers and the fruits of the nettle are not obvious, being green and light brown, and being hidden away along the axils and undersides of the leaves.

The root system is a shallow taproot.

HABITAT

Nettles are found throughout New Zealand with the preferred habitat being in gardens, sheep camps, under trees, along riverbeds and in waste areas. Nettles also often appear in sites that have been disturbed for cropping or pasture renewal purposes.

MANUAL CONTROL

If you are prepared to *seize the nettle* then manual removal is effective for sparsely distributed plants. They come out easily because of the shallow root. However, nettles usually establish themselves in fairly extensive patches, which would necessitate herbicide control instead.

HERBICIDE CONTROL

Nettles are more easily controlled if sprayed at the seedling stage, up to 4 leaves or so. Beyond that control becomes less certain, and multiple treatments will probably be required to get a thorough kill.

Cereal Crops

- **MCPA 750** at 1.5L/Ha in 200-300L water, boom sprayed when the nettle is at the 2-4 leaf stage, and when the cereal crop is between 5 leaf and jointing.

For linseed and grass seed crops, use **MCPA 750** as above, but at just 0.75-1L/Ha, and when the nettles are as young as possible and actively growing.

Pasture

- **MCPA 750** at 1.5L/Ha in 200-300L water.

- **2,4-D** at 2-3L/Ha for a 680g/L active formulation (*at the time of writing Rainbow & Brown has a 2,4-D product in registration; watch for it soon!*)

Note that both MCPA 750 and 2,4-D will suppress clover in pasture. Rainbow & Brown has a clover-friendly option in development for 2011. The more clover friendly product MCPB can also be used on very small (2 leaf) nettle seedlings, but at 6L/Ha it is quite expensive.

Spot Spraying

- **GrassMate** at 6ml/L of water used in a knapsack or other hand sprayer.

Horticulture & Glyphosate Resistance

Note that nettle is fairly resistant to glyphosate and quite high rates. Several applications are required to make any worthwhile progress at all. In situations like orchards where MCPA or 2,4-D are too risky to use, the best option is to use a product containing glufosinate-ammonium.

