

WEED FILE:

ONEHUNGA WEED

REVISED: NOVEMBER 2015



Soliva sessilis

DESCRIPTION

Onehunga weed hardly needs to be introduced to anyone in New Zealand, especially anyone who goes barefoot on the grass. Its nasty prickles are familiar to pretty much everybody.

Originating in South America, including at latitudes similar to New Zealand, Onehunga weed is so called here after the Auckland suburb where it was first reported.

It is a very low growing, creeping annual weed that forms expanding patches in lawns, turf and sports fields.

The plant is generally a winter annual, so that it germinates in the autumn, grows through the winter, flowers Oct-Dec, and produces fresh seeds (fruits) that are then spread by the feet and jandals of every innocent bystander who walks across the plant. But occasionally, as if its prickles were not irritation enough, Onehunga weed will instead germinate in spring, presumably in order to spread the joy more evenly over the year.

The leaves are 15-50mm long and finely divided, as well as being arrayed in branching segments, so that they have a feathered overall appearance.

Flowers are green and very small, and effectively inconspicuous within the leaf axils.

The fruit is not so inconspicuous, due to its being the source of the painful foot prickles that this weed is so well known for. The individual fruits, also known as the prickles, are small and oval shaped, about 3-4mm long and each with a sharp 2.5mm spine on one end.

The root system is fibrous and shallow, but the above ground stems are creeping and readily take root at the nodes, resulting in the spread of the individual plants to patches about 40cm across. The plant grows very low, and is usually beneath the cutting height of a mower blade.

HABITAT

Onehunga weed is common throughout the North Island, in particular the upper half. It does also occur, but to a much lesser extent, in scattered places in the upper and central South Island. The preferred habitat is of course lawns, as well as playing fields, parks, golf courses and sparse, stony pastures and waste areas.

HERBICIDE CONTROL

Most lawn and turf care herbicides do not work well against Onehunga weed. The usual phenoxy herbicides like MCPA and 2,4-D are ineffective unless boosted by the addition of other specialist actives like dicamba.

However, there are two recommended herbicides that are very effective:

- **Cobber** at 100ml/100L water for high volume spot spraying, or 1L/Ha for boom spraying. For knapsack sprayers use 25ml/10L water.

Note: Cobber herbicide is not for use in home gardens, and requires an Approved Handler certificate to apply in all circumstances. Treated plants or clippings must not be composted for at least 6 months after spraying.

- **GrassMate** at 2ml/10 square metres is a more suitable option for smaller scale use, and does not involve any Approved Handler requirement.

RESISTANCE

There have been some instances of strains of Onehunga weed becoming resistant to the actives in both Cobber (clopyralid) and GrassMate (picloram/triclopyr). If you experience a poor result with either of these products, or if the level of control over the years appears to be waning, alternate with an MCPA/mecoprop/dicamba mix to regain the upper hand. The resistant strain is much less common and appears noticeably sparser and more slender in the leaf than 'normal' Onehunga weed.