

**WEED FILE:**

**STORKSBILL and  
MUSKY STORKSBILL**

REVISED: AUGUST 2014



Storksbill

Musky Storksbill



*Erodium cicutarium* - storksbill

*Erodium moschatum* – musky storksbill

**DESCRIPTION**

There are two common and closely related storksbill species, and this weed file discusses both. Measures for their effective control are largely identical.

Storksbill and musky storksbill are annual to biennial weeds that grow as a large rosette up to 30cm in diameter, and up to 50cm tall at flowering.

The leaves of both species are fern-like in appearance, radiating out from the central point to form the distinctive rosette shape. The individual leaflets of the musky storksbill are less finely divided than those of the storksbill.

It is sometimes reported that grazing the foliage of both varieties of storksbill can cause photosensitisation and staggers in lambs and cattle, although other reports hold that storksbill can be good feed for lambs. Perhaps a bit of both is the truth of the matter.

Flowers of both species are similar, and are mauve-pink, or occasionally white. Both plants are musk-scented, though the leaves of the musky storksbill also have a musk scent when crushed. Flowering is from September to May.

Both species have a taproot that becomes very substantial and deep once the plant is mature.

The seed head of both varieties is in the form of long (4-5cm) capsules, which have a slender and sharp beak on top (the shape of this capsule being the source of the common name of storksbill). The pointed fruits contained within can actually pierce the skin of animals, and burrow their way into the flesh.

**HABITAT**

The preferred habitat tends to be the most distinguishing feature between the two types of storksbill. The musky storksbill is more common in the North Island, and especially in the more fertile conditions to be found in dairy pastures, while the regular storksbill is more commonly found in drier conditions and in the South Island. But it's not exclusive and each can sometimes be

found in the other's preferred territory.

Storksbills require some exposed soil to get established, and will often appear and quickly proliferate after drought, heavy grazing or winter stock damage have opened up the pasture sward.

Lucerne and other crops are sometimes affected by musky storksbill.

Storksbills also appear in turf and sports grounds, although the rosette is so large and unsightly that the grounds staff will usually deal to them pretty quickly.

**MANUAL CONTROL**

At the early rosette stage the plant can be fairly easily pulled by hand and removed. In later growth stages the taproot becomes more extensive and fibrous, making manual removal less easy.

**HERBICIDE CONTROL**

The most critical point with storksbill is to not allow it to seed, so treatment before seeding will always be most effective, especially in terms of minimising any regrowth.

**Spot Spraying**

- **GrassMate** at 60ml/10L water. This is effective at all stages of growth of the storksbill, incl any larger-rosette survivors from boom spraying. Spray into the centre of the rosette.

**Boom Spraying**

Before spraying, graze pasture to expose weeds and reduce clover leaf.

- **2,4-D Granules** at 1.5-2kg/ha for seedlings, and 2-3kg/ha for small rosettes.
- **MCPA750** at 1.5-2.0L/ha in 200/300L water. This will be effective against seedlings and small rosettes only.

- \* **GrassMate** at 2L/ha. This will be effective against larger plants, but will be severely damaging to clover.

In all cases when spraying, for best results add **SprayWetter** penetrant at 10ml/10L water to ensure thorough penetration of the herbicide into the plant.