

WEED FILE:

WILLOW WEED

Revised - Dec 2012



Persicaria maculosa

DESCRIPTION

Willow weed is an annual plant that grows in spring and summer, and dies off in late autumn. It can be either a sprawling plant or an erect plant, depending on the location; in open areas with little competition it will tend to sprawl and spread laterally, while in more competitive surroundings such as a crop, it will initially sprawl but can then develop in a more erect form to a height of about 40cm.

As the name suggests, the leaves are shaped similarly to those of a willow tree, being sword-shaped, up to 15cm long by just 4cm wide, and dark green in colour. There is generally a dark brown/black irregular spot in the centre of the leaf's upper side, and at the base of the leaf is a sheath with a distinct fringe of hairs.

The stems are tinged with red, although not as intensively red as the similar plant, the water pepper.

The flowers of the willow weed appear in mid-summer, and are small and pink in colour, occurring in tightly-packed cylindrical bunches to 4cm in length, occurring at the ends of the stems. The flowers of similar water pepper can usually be distinguished by their distinctly greener colouring, and the fact that water pepper flowers grow in much looser and more open bunches than do the tightly packed cylinders of willow weed.

HABITAT

Willow weed prefers cultivated land, especially where conditions are dampish, and is found throughout New Zealand.

Willow weed is a particularly invasive weed, and affects both crops and pastures. At times it can be a very serious weed in crops as its rapidly sprawling habit can overwhelm and suffocate a young crop especially in the spring.

POISON

In pastures it is rarely eaten by stock, but is suspected of causing stock poisoning illness and death both in NZ and overseas.

MANUAL REMOVAL

An important point to consider when dealing with

willow weed is that although it produces a large number of tiny triangular seeds from which it reproduces, willow weed also readily reproduces from stem fragments, including very small ones. Successful manual removal of the plant therefore requires the careful collection and removal from the site of every part of it.

Willow weed is killed by frosts, but fresh seedlings appear each spring. The seeds will remain viable in the soil for a very long time, and complete eradication may take several seasons to achieve.

HERBICIDE CONTROL

In most situations, because of the rapid and invasive nature of willow weed, it will have to be dealt with via herbicides.

Boom Spraying

In both pasture and crops, boom spraying is the way to go. The plant is best controlled when it is in its younger stages of growth, especially up to the 4-leaf seedling stage. Control beyond that stage becomes less certain. As with virtually all weeds, the best results will also be achieved if it is sprayed while it is actively growing in good conditions.

The most used boom sprayed options are:

- **Decision** at 65g/Ha in 200-300L of water. This will provide suppression only of seedling stage willow weed. This option is both grass and clover friendly in pasture, and is safe for clover seed crops, established lucerne, maize and chicory.
- **MCPA750** at 2-3L/Ha in 200-300L of water. Grass friendly, but some temporary suppression of clovers in pasture is likely.

Spot Treatment

Glyphosate is effective as a spot spray but its use is rarely practical due to the damage to the surrounding crop or pasture plants. Generally boom spraying will be necessary in crop and pasture situations anyway, due to willow weed's invasive nature.

