Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development

GOVERNMENT OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

Protect Grow Innovate

Biosecurity alert: Pokeweed

(*Phytolacca americana*)

The pest and its impacts

Pokeweed (*Phytolacca americana*) is a large, perennial shrub that is toxic to livestock, humans and can contaminate agricultural produce. It is a declared pest, prohibited in Western Australia (WA) with a control category of C1 (Exclusion) and must be eradicated if found.

Pokeweed has recently been found in Perth and several locations in the south-west of WA, including Balingup, Bridgetown and Pemberton. A collaborative program to eradicate this weed is now underway with government and industry working together. The aim is to control all pokeweed plants prior to them setting seed during summer.

This plant is toxic to both humans and livestock and can contaminate agricultural produce.

Pokeweed characteristics:

- Pokeweed is found in disturbed areas, along roadsides and in gardens.
- Seedlings are often found under roosting trees as birds eat the berries and are unaffected by the natural chemicals.
- Seeds can be transported in soil.

LOOK for this pest

- large perennial shrub up to 2.5 metres
- large bright green leaves (up to 40 cm long) on a smooth purplish stem
- white to magenta flowers in elongated clusters that hang from the branches
- deep purple – black berries form in summer and are the most distinctive characteristic

Pokeweed is similar to inkweed (*Phytolacca octandra*), which is a widespread weed in the south-west of WA. Pokeweed is taller, has larger leaves, and the berry stalks hang down.

Pokeweed

Inkweed

Key points:

- All plant parts, especially the root, contain numerous saponins and oxalates and can be fatally toxic to humans and livestock when ingested raw, or with improper preparation.
- It regrows after it dies back to the thick central taproot after winter if only the above ground material is removed.
- Individual plants can live for several decades.

REPORT suspected sightings

- Be aware of any new or unusual plants
- Prompt action is necessary to assist in eradication
- Note the date, time and location of the pest
- Take photographs, if possible

Report your observations

MyPestGuide® Reporter
via app or online
mypestguide.dpird.wa.gov.au

Pest and Disease Information Service
08 9368 3080
padis@dpird.wa.gov.au

Important disclaimer

The Chief Executive Officer of the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development and the State of Western Australia accept no liability whatsoever by reason of negligence or otherwise arising from the use or release of this information or any part of it.

Copyright © State of Western Australia (Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development), 2025

PF042-25 NOV 2025