

Weed alert: *Hymenachne* ...have you seen this plant?

Young hymenachne plants. Photo: J. Vitelli



Leaves clasp the base of the stem. Photo: QDAFF



Hymenachne (*Hymenachne amplexicaulis*) is a semi-aquatic perennial grass that has become a major weed of northern Australia invading freshwater wetlands, flood plains and stream banks.

Originally introduced to Queensland and the Northern Territory as fodder for cattle in ponded pasture systems, it has escaped cultivation and become an unwanted pest of freshwater wetlands, flood plains, irrigation systems, water storage facilities and sugar cane crops.

Hymenachne forms dense infestations and thrives in nutrient-rich water. It displaces native plants, reduces biodiversity and threatens native fish populations and wetland habitats.

Many infestations occur throughout northern and central Queensland and the Northern Territory, including conservation areas of Kakadu National Park.

In New South Wales (NSW) small, isolated infestations have been found in various locations in the Richmond, Tweed and Clarence River catchments on the North Coast. All known infestations are subject to control programs, with the aim of eradication.

If left undetected, hymenachne has the potential to spread further in northern NSW and become a major weed of wetlands and waterways.

Native hymenachne (*H. acutigluma*) is a tropical species that grows in northern Australia and is not considered a problem.

WORLD STATUS

Native to the tropics of South and Central America, hymenachne has been used as a source of dry season fodder for cattle in Venezuela, Mexico and Cuba. It is considered a serious weed in Indonesia, Suriname, Trinidad and the Florida wetlands of USA.

SPREAD

Hymenachne reproduces by seed and broken stem fragments.

Each flower head can produce over 4000 viable seeds, generally in the autumn months as day length decreases. On land, seeds require contact with waterlogged or moist soil for at least 48 hours before germinating. Germination can occur at any time of the year but more commonly from November to March. Seeds can survive in water and are spread during annual flooding events and in mud attached to the fur or hooves of animals. Waterbirds may also be responsible for spreading seed.

Broken stem fragments can be carried to new locations by floodwaters, and then take root in moist soil.

Hymenachne infestation. Photo: Ann Doak



Hymenachne flower spikes. Photo: QDAFF



IDENTIFICATION

Hymenachne is a perennial grass that prefers swampy or seasonally flooded areas, growing in water up to 2 m deep.

Key identification features

- » Stems are up to 2.5 m tall, contain white pith and are hairless. On land, erect stems can stand up to 1.5 m tall, rising from stems that run along the ground. New plants are produced from horizontal stems that form roots at their lower nodes.
- » Leaf blades are 20–35 cm long and 2–3 cm wide, bright green, with light-coloured veins and hairy edges. A key characteristic is that the base of the leaf blade is slightly heart-shaped and clasped around the stem.
- » Each flower-head is spike-like and cylindrical, about 8 mm wide and up to 40 cm long.

CONTROL

Hymenachne is difficult to control and is capable of spreading from plant fragments, requiring strict hygiene procedures during its removal. If you suspect you have found *Hymenachne*, immediately contact a local council weeds officer who will assist with identification, removal and eradication.

Acknowledgements

2006 edition prepared by Rachele Osmond; 2013 edition reviewed by Rod Ensbey and edited by Elissa van Oosterhout.

References: Charleston K (2006) *Hymenachne* (*Hymenachne amplexicaulis*) Control methods and case studies, Queensland Department of Natural Resources, Mines and Water; Hosking JR, Sainty GR, Jacobs SWL & Dellow LL (in prep) The Australian WeedBOOK.

All photos supplied courtesy of the Queensland Government Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry.

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WATCH OUT FOR AND REPORT ANY FORM OF HYMENACHNE

Hymenachne is a Class 1 State Prohibited Weed across NSW under the *Noxious Weeds Act 1993*. It must be eradicated and land must be kept free of the plant. As a notifiable weed, all outbreaks must be reported to the local council within 24 hours, and the plant is prohibited from sale in NSW.

If you have seen this plant please contact your local council weeds officer, the NSW Weeds Hotline 1800 680 244 or email weeds@dpi.nsw.gov.au

For more information and
NSW DPI weed alert updates visit
www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/weeds

