

## Mimosa or Giant Sensitive Plant

*(Mimosa pigra)*

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**Family:** Mimosaceae

**Class of Declared Weed:** A (to be eradicated - south of 14° S latitude  
B (spread to be controlled - north of 13° S latitude) and  
C (not to be introduced to the Territory)

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### DESCRIPTION

Mimosa grows as a single prickly stem when young, and when mature is a branched prickly bush reaching a height of up to 6 metres. Stem prickles are 5 to 10 mm long. Leaves are bipinnate, consisting of a central prickly rachis 20 to 25 cm long with up to 16 pairs of pinnae 5 cm long, each divided into pairs of leaflets 3 to 8 mm long. Leaves are sensitive and fold up when touched and at nightfall.

Flower heads are round fluffy balls consisting of up to 100 small pink to mauve coloured flowers. Each flower head produces a cluster of 10 to 20 seed pods, 6 to 8 cm long. The pods turn brown when mature and break into segments, each containing an oblong shaped seed, 4 to 5 mm x 2 mm in size. Hairs on the segments allow them to float on water and stick to hair or clothing, hence aiding in dispersal. The plant forms aerial roots when it is growing in standing water.

### DISTRIBUTION

Mimosa is a native of Mexico, Central and South America. It is believed to have been introduced to the Northern Territory before the 1890s. Up until the late 1950s mimosa populations seemed stable and not very invasive, as the plant had not reached its favoured habitat - the open floodplains. Since then, however, mimosa has spread rapidly, particularly since the mid 1970s. It is now one of the worst weeds of the Top End,



infesting land from near the Fitzmaurice River in the west to Arnhem Land, and it is still spreading. It has the potential to colonise all the wetlands of tropical Australia.

## IMPORTANCE

Mimosa forms dense thickets, making areas inaccessible to animals and man and smothering pastures. It is a menace to pastoralists and farmers as it is found in damp places, beside billabongs and along river banks, blocking off access to irrigation and stock watering points. Mimosa can move from these to drier areas. Mustering buffalo and cattle is difficult in paddocks heavily infested with mimosa.



Mimosa is a particularly invasive plant. It displaces native vegetation and animals from large areas of land, seriously affecting conservation, tourism and traditional use of wetlands by Aboriginal people.

## RELATED PLANTS

*Mimosa pigra* is closely related to *Mimosa pudica* (common sensitive plant) which is also a declared noxious weed in the Northern Territory. *Mimosa pigra* can be distinguished by its larger size, erect, woody growth habit, large pods (6 to 8 cm long as opposed to 2.5 cm long) and by having 6 to 15 pairs of pinnae per leaf as opposed to one to two pairs.

Mimosa is often confused with *Leucaena leucocephala* (coffee bush), *Aeschynomene* spp. and *Sesbania* spp. Mimosa can be distinguished from those plants by its sensitive leaves, prickles and mauve flowers.

## CONTROL

The spread of mimosa must be controlled. You can assist by not removing soil or sand from areas where infestations are known to occur and by not driving off-road through infested areas. Machinery used in mimosa areas must be thoroughly cleaned before moving it to clean areas.

Small mimosa plants can be killed by hand pulling or by grubbing them out with a mattock, making sure to leave the roots clear of the soil. Larger infestations should be treated with a registered herbicide. Regular follow-up applications of herbicide are required because mimosa seeds can survive for long periods in the soil. The residue should be mechanically cleared and burnt, and pastures planted to help control seedlings. Pastures should not be overgrazed as this may allow for re-invasion by mimosa. Alternatively the area cleared can be left to allow for re-establishment of native flora.



To augment mechanical and chemical measures, the Department of Business, Industry and Resource Development is collaborating with CSIRO on a biological control program for mimosa. To date, nine insects have been released including seed feeders, a foliage feeder, stem borers and flower feeders. Two plant pathogens have been released.

For further information please contact your nearest Weeds Branch of the Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Environment at Darwin, Katherine, Borroloola, Timber Creek, Tennant Creek and Alice Springs, or call (08) 8999 5511.

Please visit us at our website:

**[www.nt.gov.au/dpifm](http://www.nt.gov.au/dpifm)**

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## CHARACTERISTICS TO DISTINGUISH BETWEEN SOME PRICKLY BUSHES

<b>Plant</b>	<b>Mimosa</b> ( <i>Mimosa pigra</i> )	<b>Needle Bush</b> ( <i>Acacia farnesiana</i> )	<b>Parkinsonia</b> ( <i>Parkinsonia aculeata</i> )	<b>Prickly Acacia</b> ( <i>Acacia nilotica</i> )	<b>Mesquite</b> ( <i>Prosopis limensis</i> )
<b>Pod shape</b>	Up to 8 cm long, thin strap like and curved with constrictions between seeds; pods breaking into individual segments when mature	Cigar shaped, up to 6 cm long and slightly curved	Up to 10 cm long, long thin constrictions between seeds; straight	Up to 25 cm long, necklace like, with deep constrictions between seeds	Up to 20 cm long, slight constrictions between seeds; straight or slightly curved
<b>Pod Colour</b>	Green when immature; brown and hairy at maturity	Brown to black; no hairs	Straw coloured pod; no hairs	Blue-grey, fine hairs	Straw coloured, sometimes purple; no hairs
<b>Leaves</b>	Leaves fernlike and sensitive to touch; six to 14 pairs of leaves with gap in between leaves	Leaves fernlike; two to four pairs of leaves with a gap between leaves	Leaves with long flattened leaf stalk with tiny oblong leaflets along each side	Leaves fernlike; four to 10 pairs of leaves, often overlapping	Leaves fernlike; two to five pairs of leaves, often with a gap between leaves
<b>Leaflets</b>	20 to 42 pairs of leaflets	8 to 18 pairs of leaflets	Small tree or shrub usually to 5 m tall	10 to 25 pairs of leaflets	10 to 15 pairs of leaflets
<b>Tree Shape</b>	Erect shrub to 6 m; often multistemmed	Usually rounded shrub to 3 m tall	Small tree or shrub usually to 5 m tall	Spreading three to 10 m tall	Variable shape, usually a spreading tree to 15 m tall
<b>Bark</b>	Brown; smooth	Bark grey with prominent white spots	Bark smooth and green; straw coloured and lightly textured at base of older trees	Bark on saplings has tinge of orange and/or green. Mature trees have dark rough bark	Bark rough, grey; smooth dark red or green on small branches
<b>Branch Shape</b>	More or less straight; gently curving	Branches zigzag shaped	Branches slightly zigzagged	Branches more or less straight	Branches zigzag shape