



May 2016

## Horsetails

When agricultural or environmental weeds are found early enough it is possible to eradicate small or isolated infestations with prompt action. Often it is keen-eyed members of the public who set the process in motion by recognising and reporting new weeds. The weeds featured this month are horsetails (*Equisetum* species), which are primitive non-flowering perennials dating back to the Palaeozoic Era.



Horsetail (*Equisetum hyemale*)

are reduced to a papery ring around each joint. Once established, the main means of spread is by rhizomes rather than spores.

Horsetails are targets of the Boosting Biosecurity Defences Agricultural weed surveillance project funded by Royalties for Regions (For further information see:

<https://agric.wa.gov.au/n/3835>).

### Ancient survivors

Horsetails (*Equisetum* species) have occasionally been sold as ornamentals, and they are also of interest to people who take the risk of making their own herbal remedies. Sometimes they are used in permaculture or as pond plants.

The erect, jointed stems are of two kinds. Vegetative stems are green and ribbed. They can be a single stem or have whorls of slender leaf-like branches. Fertile stems can be green, white or pale brown, topped by fruiting cones. On both stems the true leaves

In a backyard the worst horsetails can do is smother the area, but if they escape into farmland the consequences are dire. They are toxic to livestock, and in high densities they can reduce crop yield because they produce substances that inhibit the growth of other plants.

In the past, infestations of a horsetail called scouring rush (*E. hyemale*) have been found in the Perth metropolitan area at nurseries in Bedfordale and the Wanneroo area, and a home garden in Morley. Like all horsetails this one has a high silica content, and the common name arose from the old practice of using the stems to scrub pots and pans. Several other species, including common horsetail (*E. arvense*) have been found in the eastern states.



Horsetail (*Equisetum arvense*)

Please report any horsetails seen in the wild, in gardens or at weekend markets. If you have horsetail plants, do not attempt to dispose of them yourself. Please call us for advice as horsetail plants generate readily from fragments. Always take care when ordering plants or seeds via the internet, and never dump any garden rubbish in the bush.

**How you can help**

Photograph any suspicious plants and report using the free MyPestGuide Reporter App, online: [mypestguide.agric.wa.gov.au](http://mypestguide.agric.wa.gov.au), email photos and location information to: [info@agric.wa.gov.au](mailto:info@agric.wa.gov.au) or call 1800 084 881.

**New Weed App coming soon!**

The free MyWeedWatcher App will be available later this month, and will be our department's preferred way of receiving weed reports via mobile devices. For more information see: <https://www.agric.wa.gov.au/n/5412>

**Reporting unfamiliar pests**

The Pest and Disease Information Service (PaDIS) screens enquiries for new weeds, pests and plant diseases which could negatively impact the success of our local horticulture and agricultural industries, and our ability to grow home produce. Please contact us if you have concerns about an unfamiliar weed, pest or plant disease.

Report biosecurity concerns or unfamiliar pests, weeds or diseases using our MyPestGuide webpage or Mobile App, or contact the Pest and Disease Information Service (PaDIS) on 1800 084 881, [info@agric.wa.gov.au](mailto:info@agric.wa.gov.au). Visit our webpage: [agric.wa.gov.au/n/1207](http://agric.wa.gov.au/n/1207).  
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