



Department for Environment and Heritage Fact Sheet

Environmental Weeds in the South East

Myrtle-leaf Milkwort - *Polygala myrtifolia*

Myrtle-leaf Milkwort or Polygala is a common garden plant throughout South Australia. In many areas it has escaped people's gardens and is invading areas of native vegetation, particularly along the coastline.

It is a species native to South Africa and can survive in exposed areas and tolerate long hot dry periods. Myrtle-leaf Milkwort can grow in both direct sun and shaded areas.

Description

Leaves are 1-4 cm in length and 5-20 mm wide and are rectangular to oval-shaped. The upper and lower surfaces of the leaf are the same green colour. The flowers are pea-shaped, grouped at the tips of branches and have purple and white streaks. It predominantly flowers in spring, but can flower at anytime of the year. Fruits are flattened heart-shaped pods 10 mm long from which two hard dark coloured seeds are released. Seeds can be produced as soon as the plant is 50 cm high.

How does it Spread?

It only reproduces from seed, which can be distributed by birds, water, wind, ants and the dumping of garden refuse.

Myrtle-leaf Milkwort generally spreads from disturbed areas or edges of native vegetation, before spreading into more intact areas of bushland.



Myrtle - leaf Milkwort as a garden plant



Myrtle leaf - Milkwort flowers

Control

Due to its thick canopy, it will out-compete native species for sunlight, preventing the natural regeneration of the overstorey and shrub layer. This alters the habitat structure of native vegetation and is a direct threat to threatened plant species in the south east.

The Natural History Society of SA owns a Heritage Agreement near Robe, from which they have been controlling Myrtle-leaf Milkwort in for many years. While mature plants are removed from the Heritage Agreement, seeds are being blown into the Heritage Agreement from the neighbouring property where it is a garden plant. This creates an on-going problem and demonstrates the need to work closely with your neighbours on such projects.

Seedlings of Myrtle-leaf Milkwort should be hand pulled and larger plants can be cut at the base from which they rarely re-grow. However, care should be taken in areas that are susceptible to erosion. Mature plants can also be sprayed with a non-selective herbicide, but this is the least desired control method, as off-target damage will occur in areas of native vegetation. As seeds remain viable for up to 3 years, long term follow-up work is required. Fire is useful in killing mature plants, but follow-up work is required, as prolific germination of seedlings will occur.

Further information on this species contact the Bush Management Adviser, South East, on (08) 8735 1143.

Further Information

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