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.

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**

Department for Environment and Heritage

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