Restricted invasive plant

Mexican bean tree

Cecropia spp.

Mexican bean tree is found throughout tropical America. It is a rapidly growing tree that has the potential to invade and dominate tropical and subtropical rainforests, disturbed sites as well as forests that have been damaged by cyclones.

Legal requirements

All *Cecropia* species are prohibited invasive plants except *Cecropia pachystachya, C. palamata* and *C. peltata* which are category 2, 3, 4 and 5 restricted invasive plants under the *Biosecurity Act 2014*. The Act requires that all sightings of Mexican bean trees must be reported to Biosecurity Queensland within 24 hours of the sighting.

By law, everyone has a general biosecurity obligation (GBO) to take all reasonable and practical steps to minimise the risk of spread of Mexican bean trees until they receive advice from an authorised officer. It must not be kept, moved, given away, sold, or released into the environment.

Description

Mexican bean tree is a rapidly growing tree, usually growing 10–20 m tall (but can grow up to 25 m tall in the right situation). The distinguishing features of Mexican bean trees are the hollow stems, the large leaves (which resemble pawpaw leaves) and the lower surface of the

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leaf being densely covered with white hairs, presenting a very pale to nearly white/silvery colour. Petioles are usually 23–30 cm long and stipules 7–11 cm long.

Mexican bean tree is dioecious, separate individual male and female plants. Inflorescences consist of a common stalk bearing a number of spikes arranged in umbellate clusters. The staminate (male) inflorescences can contain up to 50 spikes, 5–18 cm long; whilst the number of spikes (5–30 cm long) on the pistillate (female) inflorescence can vary between 2 and 14.

The flowers in both cases are fairly inconspicuous, whereas the fruit of the female plant forms distinctive cylindrical, 4–10 mm diameter, finger-like spikes with soft, sweet flesh surrounding the many small seeds.

Habitat and distribution

Mexican bean tree prefers wetter habitats such as riparian zones and dry rainforest remnants.

Mexican bean tree is native to Central and South America and the West Indies. An unknown number of Mexican bean trees were given away or sold by a private plant collector, possibly the original importer, near Mission Beach, North Queensland. Mexican bean trees have also been found in gardens in Mackay, Cairns, Gold and Sunshine Coasts and Brisbane. They are all targeted for eradication.

Life cycle

Mexican bean tree matures in 3–5 years. It has been recorded to flower as early as three years of age. Flowers are wind-pollinated and produce about 18% viable seeds. Mexican bean tree produces millions of seeds per plant.

Methods of spread

Because of its attractive foliage, the Mexican bean tree has been subject to sale and distribution via gardeners. Its spread from gardens has mainly occurred via fruit bats and birds.

Control

All suspected sightings of Mexican bean trees must be reported to Biosecurity Queensland, which will work with the relevant person to control the plant. Anyone finding suspected plants should immediately take steps to minimise the risk of Mexican bean trees spreading.

Further information

Further information is available from your local government office, or by contacting Biosecurity Queensland on 13 25 23 or visit biosecurity.qld.gov.au.

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