

# Striga asiatica

## Recognize the problem

Family: Orobanchaceae (broomrape family).

Common names: Asiatic witchweed, red witchweed, witchweed, Striga

**French:** Herbe des sorcières, Striga; **Kinyarwanda:** Kurisuka, Bariyentaraza, Mugabudatsimburwa, Rwonja; **Chichewa:** Kaufiti; **Kiswahili:** Viduha.

Annual, broadleaved, parasitic herb (30cm high); always associated with hosts in the grass family; stems are four-sided, branched or unbranched, with rough hairs and opposite leaves; has few roots; feeds on the roots of its hosts.

Leaves: Green and narrowly lanceolate (1-5cm long), sparsely covered in rough hairs.

Flowers: Colour highly variable, generally red in East and South Africa, yellow variant also present in Africa, and almost invariably white variant in India and Myanmar; flowers small (1cm) and arranged in spikes.

Fruits: Swollen seed pods (0.5cm) containing several hundred seeds.

Seeds: Brown, small and dust-like (0.3 mm long). Seeds may remain dormant in the soil for 10-20 years.

## Background

Origin: Probably native to Asia and sub-Saharan Africa.

Introduction: Seed contaminant.

Habitat: Semi-arid tropic regions of Africa and Asia; favoured by relatively dry, infertile soil conditions, often associated with sandy soils, but can grow in a wide range of soil types.

Spread: Seeds are spread by wind, water, soil, animals, man, machinery, vehicles and as a contaminant of crop and pasture seed and fodder.

Invades: Crop fields and grasslands; parasitized crops include sorghum, maize, millets, rice and sugarcane.

Impacts: Plants parasitized by Striga are less able to acquire nutrients and water. Scorched leaf borders and stunted growth of the host may occur prior to emergence of the weed. The parasite causes reduction in plant growth and substantial reduction in crop yields. Irrigated crops are not generally attacked. Crop damage is especially severe under conditions of marginal rainfall and low soil fertility. Yield loss may often be equivalent to 1% of crop yield for each plant of *S. asiatica* per m<sup>2</sup>. This species of witchweed can cause yield losses of >20%.

In **Tanzania**, the species is a quarantine species - it must not be moved out of the infested area.

Striga asiatica. (Photo by © Ton Rulkens, Flickr.com)



Striga asiatica in rice. (Photo by © AfricaRice, Flickr.com)



Scientific name(s) > **Striga asiatica**

The recommendations in this factsheet are relevant to: All Countries



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