

# Striga hermonthica

## Recognize the problem

Family: Orobanchaceae (broomrape family).

Common names: Purple witchweed, giant witchweed, witchweed, Striga.

**Kiswahili:** Kayongo, gugu chawi; **Amharic:** Atkur, akenchira, akentera, ymeher kiting; **Oromo:** Letisa, diesso; Tigirigna: Metselem; **Chichewa:** Kaufiti; French: Herbe des sorcières; **Kinyarwanda:** Kurisuka, bariyentaraza, mugabudatsimburwa, rwna; **Luganda:** Kayongo.

Annual, broadleaved, parasitic herb (30-100 cm high); erect, sometimes creeping; 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 (2-8 cm long), narrowly lanceolate, sparsely covered in rough hairs.

Flowers: Bright pink, rose-red and/or white, small (1cm long) and arranged in spikes (6-10 flowers per spike).

Fruits: The swollen seed pod (0.5cm) contains 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: Unknown, possibly north-east Africa.

Introduction: Seed contaminant.

Habitat: Semi-arid tropical regions of Africa and Asia; associated with low-fertility soils; grows on light, sandy soils but also on heavy clays; prefers low soil moisture; rarely on irrigated soils, but tolerant to high moisture for short periods.

Spread: Seeds are spread by wind, water, soil, animals, man, machinery, vehicles and as 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 witchweed are less able to acquire nutrients and water. The parasite causes characteristic yellowish blotches (about 1 cm long by 0.5 cm wide) on the foliage of the host plant, sometimes even before emerging from the ground. The weed causes reduction in plant growth and substantial reduction in crop yields. In Sub-Saharan Africa, Striga can cause yield losses of 30-100%, in particular in low-rainfall and nutrient-poor conditions.

This species is a quarantine species in **Tanzania** – it must not be moved out of the infested area.

Purple witchweed infestation. (Photo by USDA APHIS PPQ - Oxford, North Carolina, USDA APHIS PPQ, Bugwood.org)



Purple witchweed on maize. (Photo by USDA APHIS PPQ - Oxford, North Carolina, USDA APHIS PPQ, Bugwood.org)



Scientific name(s) > *Striga hermonthica*

The recommendations in this factsheet are relevant to: All Countries



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