

## Bellyache bush

### *Jatropha gossypifolia*

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Bellyache bush is a multi-stemmed shrub or small tree to 3 m high, with soft woody, succulent-like stems that are densely covered with conspicuous glandular hairs.

It is now declared under the *Natural Resources Management Act 2004*, with prohibition on sale and movement throughout South Australia.

- **Other common names:** black physic nut, cotton-leaf jatropa, cotton-leaf physic nut, cotton-leaved physic nut, cottonleaf physic nut.
- **Family:** Euphorbiaceae
- **Synonyms:** *Manihot gossypifolia*
- **Origin:** tropical central and South America, Caribbean islands

#### WHY IS IT A PROBLEM?

Bellyache bush is an aggressive and invasive shrub in central and northern Australia. It was introduced to Australia for medicinal and ornamental purposes 130 years ago. Its invasive nature and toxicity could produce economic, environmental and social impacts.

- forms dense thickets
- competes with native vegetation and reduces biodiversity
- competes with pasture in rangelands
- toxic to livestock and humans





## For more information

Contact your local Natural Resources Centre for information on controlling declared weeds:

[www.naturalresources.sa.gov.au](http://www.naturalresources.sa.gov.au)

Further weed control information is also available at:

[www.pir.sa.gov.au/biosecuritysa](http://www.pir.sa.gov.au/biosecuritysa)

## DESCRIPTION

**Habit:** squat, thick-stemmed shrub to 3 m tall. **Stems:** thick, rather soft stems which are green or red when juvenile, and greying as they mature, and contain a sticky, watery sap. **Leaves:** have 3-5 finely toothed lobes, and are edged with sticky, glandular-tipped hairs. Plants may drop most of their leaves during the dry season. Colour is variable displaying green, bronze, red or purple. **Fruit:** 3 lobed capsule, bright green when juvenile, pale green or tan and woody at maturity. Fruit explodes (dehiscent) when ripe, shooting seed up to 13 m from parent plant. **Seeds:** brown, 7-8 mm long, with a fleshy structure (caruncle) on one end. **Flowers:** small and occur in clusters at the ends of the stems, ranging in colour from light red to dark purple on the outer petal sections and have a yellow centre.

## HOW IT SPREADS

Bellyache bush spreads by seeds, and one mature plant can produce between 2000 and 12000 seeds per year. The main long distance vector is water. The caruncle is rich in fats and proteins and attracts ants, which aid in localised seed dispersal. Birds and animals can carry seeds medium distances. Bellyache bush also regenerates from plant parts.

## HABITAT

Bellyache bush invades open woodland and grassland areas in warm climates, especially in riparian habitats and disturbed areas. It can be found on roadsides, refuse tips, mine sites, abandoned properties in a broad range of soil types in summer wet/ winter dry climates.

## DISTRIBUTION

Bellyache bush is not known to be present in South Australia. It is naturalised in Western Australia, Northern Territory & Queensland.

## WHAT CAN YOU DO?

Seek control advice if you have this weed. Select alternative plants to replace invasive garden plants. Read 'Grow Me Instead' for suggestions.

Bellyache bush plant & flower images, courtesy of Tony Pernas, USDI National Park Service, Bugwood.org

Bellyache bush leaves & glandular nodes images, courtesy of [www.starrenvironmental.com/](http://www.starrenvironmental.com/)

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