

Polygala

Polygala myrtifolia

January 2015

Polygala is an introduced shrub growing up to 3m tall, with purple, pea-like flowers appearing at or near the ends of the branches.

Polygala is declared under the *Natural Resources Management Act 2004*; its sale is prohibited and land owners may be required to control infestations throughout South Australia.

- **Other common names:** myrtle-leaf milkwort, parrot bush, sweet pea bush/shrub, September bush, Bellarine pea.
- **Family:** Polygalaceae
- **Synonyms:** *P. myrtifolia* var. *amoena*, *P. myrtifolia* var. *grandiflora*
- **Origin:** Native to South Africa
- Widely planted as garden ornamental that has become a garden escapee.

WHY IS IT A PROBLEM?

Polygala is an invasive weed that forms dense stands, outcompeting native vegetation.

- highly invasive in coastal areas, including dune systems, coastal bluffs and heath
- also invades inland areas including grassy woodland and mallee
- rapidly builds up large populations of plants which then form dense thickets
- can dominate shrub canopy, displacing native vegetation and causing habitat loss
- rapidly regenerates from a long-lived seedbank after disturbance, clearing or fire



Polygala myrtifolia leaves & foliage - Biosecurity SA



Polygala infestation - Biosecurity SA



For more information

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

www.naturalresources.sa.gov.au

Further weed control information is also available at:

www.pir.sa.gov.au/biosecuritysa

DESCRIPTION

Habit: erect to spreading shrub to 3 m high. **Stems:** purplish with short hairs when young. Smooth and woody when older. **Leaves:** oblong to oval, mostly tapering to the base, 1.5 - 4 cm long, alternately arranged along stems. **Flowers:** cClusters of purple-mauve pea-like flowers, consisting of a pair of large petal-like wings (sepals) which are purple and green veined, 2 mauve wing petals, and a third petal forming a white keel with a brush-like crest. **Flowering time:** throughout year but mainly late winter – spring. **Fruit:** heart-shaped capsule containing two seeds.

HOW IT SPREADS

Polygala is spread by seeds. These are dispersed by garden waste dumping, water, birds, in soil moved by machinery and locally by ants.

HABITAT

Found in dune systems, coastal bluffs, woodlands, heathland, grasslands, dry sclerophyll forests, riparian vegetation and mallee shrubland, in shallow soils over calcrete or deep calcareous sands.

DISTRIBUTION

Polygala is found in the Eyre Peninsula, Yorke Peninsula, Southern Lofty, Kangaroo Island and South East regions. It is also naturalised in Western Australia, New South Wales, Victoria and Tasmania.

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

Seek control advice if you have this weed. Select alternatives to replace invasive garden plants. Read 'Grow Me Instead' for suggestions. Many cultivars of *Polygala chamaebuxus*, *Polygala dalmaisiana* and other hybrids are safe substitutes for *Polygala myrtifolia*.

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