

MIMOSA PIGRA L.

Common Names: Catclaw mimosa, giant sensitive-plant, shamebush

Synonymy: None

Origin: Central America

Botanical Description: Sprawling, often thicket-forming shrub to 6 m (20 ft) tall, with hairy stems bearing numerous recurved prickles to 7 mm (0.3 in) long. Leaves alternate, twice compound, sensitive to touch; leaf petiole and rachis to 20 cm (8 in) long, with prickles at junctions with 5-12 pairs of pinnae; each pinna with 24-31 pairs of leaflets, these to 8 mm (0.3 in) long, often with threadlike hairs on margins. Flowers small, mauve to pink, in stalked, dense, spherical heads, about 1 cm (0.5 in) across, with about 100 flowers per head; 8 stamens. Fruit a brown-bristly, segmented, flat pod to 8 cm (3 in) long and 1.4 cm (0.5 in) wide, with the 9-24 segments breaking free individually, each containing a seed; pods in clusters, or “hands” of usually 7, at stem tips.

Ecological Significance: Emerged as a serious weed of wetlands in the 1970s in Australia and Thailand (Lonsdale 1992). By the late 1980s in Australia, had formed dense thickets covering some 800 km² (over 300 mi²) in floodplains and swamp forests, with infestations doubling in size each year (Braithewaite *et al.* 1989). Introduced into Florida before 1953; first collected that year in Palm Beach and Okeechobee counties as apparent escapees from cultivation; possibly brought to Florida as a botanical curiosity or as an accidental contaminant in imported nursery stock (R. Kipker, Florida Department of Environmental Protection, 1997 personal communication). Large infestations in Florida first noted in 1985 (Nall *et al.* 1986). Infested natural areas now totaling nearly 400 ha (1,000 acres) in Broward, Palm Beach, Martin, St. Lucie, and Highlands counties, including shoreline of the Loxahatchee River (Sutton *et al.* 1994). In Australia, has formed dense understories in swamps, shading out native tree seedlings and altering bird, reptile, and vegetation communities (Braithewaite *et al.* 1989, Lonsdale 1992). Similar stands found among south Florida cypress (R. Kipker, Florida Department of Environmental Protection, personal observations).

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Touch-sensitive leaves

Distribution: Widespread throughout the tropics (Lonsdale 1992). In Florida, so far eradicated just in 2 small sites, both disturbed urbanized areas (R. Kipker, Florida Department of Environmental Protection, 1997 personal communication).

Life History: Forms dense, impenetrable thickets in wet areas, but will also grow in drier habitats (Miller and Tjitrosoedirdjo 1992). Flowers all year in Florida, with seed set within 5 weeks from flowering (Sutton and Langeland 1993). Spread primarily by seed floating away on water (Lonsdale 1992); observed to sink within 10 days in Florida (Sutton and Langeland 1993). Germinates best on damp, not dry or saturated soil; will germinate under water but remains slow in its growth until emersed. Germinates year-round (Sutton and Langeland 1993), with a small percentage (6.8% in Florida studies) of seed crop not germinating but remaining viable as a long-term seed bank (Lonsdale 1992, Sutton and Langeland 1992).

DS



Pod cluster (“hand”)

DS



Leaves, prickles

DS



Flower head, young leaves