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 (Londsdale 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 (Braithwaite 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 (Braithwaite et al. 1989, Londsdale 1992). Similar stands found among south Florida cypress (R. Kipker, Florida Department of Environmental Protection, personal observations).
**Distribution:** Widespread throughout the tropics (Londsdale 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 Tjitrosoedirjo 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 (Londsdale 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 (Londsdale 1992, Sutton and Langeland 1992).