Balsam Pear, Bitter Gourd, Bitter Melon or Fu qua

*Momordica charantia*  (Non Restricted Invasive Weed)

Native to India and South East Asia, balsam pear was introduced to Australia as an ornamental vegetable or Pickle. Balsam pear is grown commercially around Sydney, and in Queensland, with the largest area of production in the Northern Territory.

It is a vigorous vine that has now naturalised in Queensland and is an invader of disturbed sites. It will climb over the limbs and foliage of plants creating a dense mat over areas of native vegetation in lowland rainforest and along creek beds along the Queensland coastal regions.

Balsam pear is an invasive plant which can disrupt native flora communities and ecosystems.

**Description**

Balsam pear is an annual, climbing, slender vine not exceeding a stem diameter of 2 cm and grows for three months over summer. Germination of seeds can be seen at the end of December and early January.

Leaves are alternate and are up to 15cm in width, palmate into 5 to 7 distinct sections, with noticeable mid veins and light green in colour. The leaves emit a pungent odour when crushed. The tendrils grow from the node of the leaf.

In February, pale, yellow flowers with five petals, approximately 2cm in width can be seen. The fruit, starts to develop mid-February to March is yellow- orange, around 5cm in length and covered with sharply, ridged nodules. Once ripened, the fruit opens to reveal bright red flesh and numerous black seeds.

**Management**

Most small infestations can be removed manually. If the infestation has covered the canopy of shrubs and trees, cut the balsam pear around the trunk. The remainder of the vine should be dug out by the roots and disposed in a bin.
