Red witchweed (*Striga asiatica*) is a parasitic weed. It grows attached to the roots of a host plant. The weed robs its host of water and nutrients, suppressing its growth.

Red witchweed affects economically important crops such as sorghum, corn (maize), rice and sugar cane. It can also be found growing on a wide range of tropical grasses common in headlands and pastures. Red witchweed can survive and produce seeds in a wide range of soils, but generally prefers free-draining sandy or gravelly soils. The most likely place to find red witchweed in a commercial crop is in these soil types.

**Description**

Red witchweed grows 10–40cm tall and its leaves are arranged in opposite pairs along the stem.

Leaves are 6–40mm long and 1–4mm wide, and have a tapered, pointed tip. Its flowers are 5–20mm in diameter and are usually red, but can be white, yellow or pink.

Seeds of red witchweed are tiny (dust-like) and can easily drop into the soil, enabling its spread.

Red witchweed reproduces from seeds. A single plant can produce 25,000 to 200,000 seeds. The minute seeds are dispersed by wind, water, soil movement or human activities, or by adhering to the feet, fur or feathers of animals. When a vehicle or machine is driven through a weed-infested area, seeds can become lodged and carried considerable distances before dislodging in new areas.

**Management**

If you suspect you have red witchweed:

1. You must report the plant to Biosecurity Queensland on 13 25 23;
2. Take photos of the infestation and store until you are contacted by Biosecurity Queensland;
3. Do not attempt to remove any flowering plants, as this may spread the tiny, dust-like seeds;
4. Avoid moving any soil, machinery or products (including mulch) that might contain soil off-site. This will help avoid spread of seeds to other properties; and
5. Seeds are primarily spread over long distances within soil. Therefore, keep the weed in place until Biosecurity Queensland can investigate;

Adequate wash-down of machinery and equipment, and observation of other biosecurity precautions can reduce the risk of spreading red witchweed.