

# Bathurst bur

*Xanthium spinosum*

Bathurst bur is a pest plant in Northland and cannot legally be propagated, sold or distributed in any way.

Bathurst bur is of limited distribution in Northland, found mainly in the cropping areas of Kaipara District. It is predominately a weed of kumara and other crops, but also infests roadsides, pasture and other land.

## ORIGINS

Native to South America, Bathurst bur has spread to most temperate, subtropical and tropical parts of the world. It is a significant pest plant in 39 countries. Invasion into new countries has been caused by livestock importation and contaminated grain. Bathurst bur was introduced into New Zealand around 1860, probably via burs in sheep fleeces. Its name refers to the first recorded Australian infestation at Bathurst in New South Wales.



*Narrow pointed leaves with white midrib.*



*Close up of burs, note hooked spines.*

## DESCRIPTION

Bathurst bur is an erect, well branched, annual herb up to one metre tall which grows from a branched taproot. Its yellow-green stems are armed at the base of each leaf stalk and stem joint with one or two three-pronged yellow spines. Each of these prongs is about 2cm long. The leaves are up to 7cm long, narrow and pointed, mostly three-lobed with the middle lobe longer than the others. The leaf upper surface is a shiny dark green with prominent white midrib, whilst the underside is pale green and downy. Flowers are tiny and greenish-cream in colour. The seed capsule is an oval straw coloured bur, 15mm by 5mm, covered with numerous slender yellow hooked spines. Inside each bur are two brown or black flattened seeds, each about 1cm long.

Seeds germinate from November to January and the plant grows to maturity in March-April, producing burs and then dying off in early winter. Burs remain attached to dead plants until they are trampled or transported elsewhere by animals. One of each pair of seeds germinates the following summer and the other remains dormant for 2-3 years, occasionally up to 15 years.



*Whitish underside of leaf and yellow 3-pronged spines.*

### THREAT TO NORTHLAND

The burs cling fast to wool, fur, sacking, clothing and any fibrous material. Seeds are therefore mainly dispersed by livestock and people. However soil movement and water-borne burs can contribute to distribution.

Uncertified seed of summer crop species such as maize, sorghum and sunflowers may also be contaminated by burs. Bird seed, poultry feed, horse oats and produce such as tomatoes can also carry burs.

Bathurst bur will grow on any warm bare soil of medium to high fertility. Therefore any disturbed ground can potentially harbour the weed. Crops, stockyards and races, roadsides, market gardens and orchards, and any bare patches in pasture are likely sites of infestation.

Bathurst bur is a serious weed of sheep farms as the burs contaminate wool, adding considerable costs to the grower. They also irritate the skin of shearers and cause jamming and breaking of cutters and combs. The plant's spines damage the feet and skin of all livestock. In summer crops the plant itself is a strong competitor and the spines are a severe nuisance to pickers of hand harvested crops. Burs contaminate harvested seed lines, adding to seed dressing costs. Bathurst bur also acts as a host for several horticultural fungal diseases.

The plant's seedlings are slightly toxic to cattle, goats, poultry and sheep, and moderately toxic to horses and pigs. However stock poisoning by Bathurst bur is not a major problem in New Zealand. It can cause contact dermatitis in some people.

### WHAT CAN YOU DO?

Prevent Bathurst bur entering your property by inspecting the coats of all stock originating from infested areas. With cattle, pay particular attention to tails, bellies and legs. Check all wool on sheep. Carefully inspect all non-certified seed lines, especially maize and sunflowers.

Seedlings are best controlled by grubbing. Mature plants should be sprayed, or if grubbed, the plants should be burned to kill the seed in the burs.

For a full description of recommended application methods, herbicides currently available and land occupiers responsibilities, please refer to Pest Update 3A - Bathurst Bur.

*For more information, contact Northland Regional Council Land Operations staff at one of the addresses below.*



*One metre plant, with dense branched habit.*

### REGIONAL COUNCIL OFFICES

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REGIONAL  
COUNCIL**



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