

Rat's tail (457)

Summary

- Widespread. Asia, Africa, North, South and Central America, Caribbean, Oceania. In many Pacific islands.
- Invasive weed of plantations, pastures, grasslands, forests and forest margins, secondary fallows, sand dunes, waste areas, and roadsides. Threatens natural vegetation. Aggressiveness because large seed production (7000 from one plant). Produces chemicals inhibiting growth of competitors.
- Perennial shrub, 1-1.5 m tall. Stems, greenish with purple, becoming round and woody. Leaves, oval, 5-8 cm long, opposite along stems, with saw-like margins. Flowers, dark blue, purple or violet, about 1 cm across, on spikes, up to 45 cm long, at top of stems, without stalks. Flowers, with five petals forming tube, with two stamens. Spikes become woody. Fruits develop within cavities. Seeds brown/black.
- Spread: seeds, fur of animals; clothing; machinery; use as an ornamental;
- Biosecurity: as an ornamental; contaminant of pasture seed; among 10 worst weeds in American Samoa, French Polynesia, Solomon Islands.
- Biocontrol: little known.
- Cultural control: hand weed; do not overgraze; slash and apply herbicide; improve pastures with recommended grasses and legumes; vehicle hygiene.
- Chemical control: in Australia: slash or mow plants, wait for regrowth, then apply glyphosate (and Fiji); 2,4-D; fluroxypyr; dicamba.

Common Name

Blue rat's tail; it is also known as dark blue snakeweed. CABI prefers the name rattail.

Scientific Name

Stachytarpheta urticifolia. It is a member of Verbenaceae.

There are a number of other *Stachytarpheta* species: *Stachytarpheta cayennensis*, *Stachytarpheta indica*, and *Stachytarpheta jamaicensis*. There has been considerable confusion and misidentifications between these. Some authorities think that *Stachytarpheta urticifolia* is the same as *Stachytarpheta cayennensis*, while others prefer to keep them separate - the flowers of *Stachytarpheta cayennensis* are pale blue to white.

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Adapted from Dark blue snakeweed (*Stachytarpheta cayennensis*) (2018) Weeds of SE Qld and Northern NSW. Lucidcentral. (<https://www.lucidcentral.org/editors-pick-animal-and-plant-identification-keys/key-to-weeds-of-se-qld-and-northern-nsw>); and additional information from CABI (2019) *Stachytarpheta urticifolia* (rattail). Invasive Species Compendium. (<https://www.cabi.org/isc/datasheet/117323>); Waterhouse DF, Norris KR (1987) *Stachytarpheta urticifolia*. *Biological Control Pacific Prospects*. Inkata Press, Melbourne; and *Stachytarpheta cayennensis* (2019) Wikipedia. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stachytarpheta_cayennensis); and from Snakeweed *Stachytarpheta* spp. (2020) Queensland Government. (https://www.daf.qld.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0005/54392/snakeweed.pdf). Photos 1&3 Forest & Kim Starr, Starr Environmental. Photo 2. Tonton Bernado. *Stachytarpheta urticifolia* (Verbenaceae).

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Photo 1. Patch of rat's tail, *Stachytarpheta urticifolia*.



Photo 2. Leaves of rat's tail, *Stachytarpheta urticifolia*.



Photo 3. Close-up of flower, rat's tail, *Stachytarpheta urticifolia*.

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