The Layman’s Guide to Invasive Alien Vegetation in our region
Southern Cape Weeds Forum
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*Lantana camara*

*Lantana camara* (commonly known as Lantana) is considered one of the 10 worst weeds in the world and comes in at number four in South Africa. Not only is Lantana very invasive and classified as a transformer but it is also one of the most common causes of livestock poisoning in South Africa. Cases of human poisoning have also occurred. *L. camara* is classified as a Category 1b: Invasive species which must be controlled and wherever possible, removed and destroyed. Any form of trade or planting is strictly prohibited.

**Identification:** Lantana is easily identified almost all year by the very pretty clusters of multi-coloured flowers that may vary from pink, red, crimson, orange, yellow or white. The flower head is flat and compact often with many colours in one flower head. The fruits turn black when ripe and is a firm favourite with birds and other animals such as rodents and monkeys and appear to be non-toxic to these animals. Both birds and animals act as seed dispersal agents. Particularly interesting is that after pollination the flowers change colour (typically from yellow to red/pink/orange), this is believed to signal to pollinators that the pre-change colour contains a reward as well as being sexually viable, thus increasing pollination efficiency. The foliage is dark green in colour with serrated margins. Leaves are stiff, roughly hairy and exudes a pungent unpleasant scent when crushed. The stems are very thorny.

**Impacts:** Lantana is a transformer, forming thick impenetrable stands along forest margins, degraded land, road reserves, etc. Where the plants proliferate they shade out and outgrow any indigenous plants and in addition, *L. camara* excretes chemicals which reduce the growth of surrounding plants by inhibiting germination and root elongation thus impacting heavily on biodiversity. Dense stands pose a fire risk as result of increased biomass and fuel load.

**Control:** The most common practice is chopping down dense bushes and treating the stumps and re-growth with a registered herbicide. Caution must be exercised that no cuttings are left behind with a node in contact with the soil as these readily take root and establish new plants. “Chopper” is recommended as the herbicide suitable for stump treatment and re-growth can be sprayed with a 3% mix of “Roundup” or other glyphosate herbicide. Much research have been done into the use of biological control agents but unfortunately with limited success due to the fact that over 50 different variants of the species have been identified and effective agents have only been identified for a small number of the variants.

A very simple method of identification is the exceptionally unpleasant odour released by a bruised leaf. Even seedlings have this pungent odour making identifying seedlings and young plants simple and control by hand weeding easy. Please remember to wash your hands after contact with this plant.