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Gorteria : a recently recorded weed

Department of Agriculture, Western Australia

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A NUMBER of our major weed pests including Cape tulip and double gee are native to South Africa. It is not surprising, therefore, that Gorteria, recently recorded for the first time in Western Australia, also comes from that country.

During the summer of 1964, some burr-bearing plants found along the roadside between Moora and Miling were identified as *Gorteria calendulacea* an annual species belonging to the thistle family. The spiny, burr-like seed heads drew attention to the dry plants. A close inspection during the winter revealed a number of growing plants scattered along the roadside and also extending into an adjoining paddock. Later a more extensive area was located at Bindi Bindi where the weed occurred in patches over approximately ten acres in the vicinity of the sports ground. All areas found were sprayed with good results although difficulty was experienced in locating plants among other herbage.

As Gorteria had not been recorded previously in Australia its importance as a weed cannot be assessed from experience. The dry seed heads, with their spiny bracts resemble those of cockspur thistle and the two plants could be comparable as weeds. The seed heads would undoubtedly adhere to wool although not having the hooked spines of Bathurst burr.

Any new weed introduction must be regarded with concern and farmers, particularly in the Moora and Miling districts, should maintain a watch for Gorteria. The illustrations and following description should assist with its identification:

The plants usually grow to a height of 12-18 inches with numerous spreading branches from rather woody stems. The leaves are up to 3 inches long, dark green above, paler below with a lobed or toothed
margin. They are narrowed at the base into a rather broad leaf stalk. The stems and leaves are covered with rigid hairs, making them rough to the touch. The flowers are yellow and are borne in heads at the ends of the branches. They are surrounded by a number of narrow green protecting bracts, and as the flowers mature, these bracts harden and bend outwards to form a rigid spiny burr enclosing up to eight seeds. The burrs readily fall to the ground and the spines assist their spread by stock and machinery.
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Journal of Agriculture, Vol 6 No 7 1965
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