

# Mother-of-millions

*Bryophyllum delagoense* (syn. *B. tubiflorum*,  
*Kalanchoe delagoensis*) and *Bryophyllum* × *houghtonii*



Mother-of-millions are native to Madagascar and are escaped ornamental plants. Five species are commonly naturalised in Queensland. It is well adapted to dry areas because of its succulent features.

As the name suggests, one plant can reproduce a new generation from masses of embryoids (plantlets) that are formed on the leaf edges. This makes these plants hard to eradicate and follow up controls are essential.

These plants, especially their flowers, are poisonous to stock and occasionally cause a significant number of cattle deaths. The plant flowers from May to October (during the drier months of the year) and the scarcity of feed at this time may cause cattle to consume lethal amounts of mother-of-millions.

## Legal requirements

Mother-of-millions is a category 3 restricted invasive plant under the *Biosecurity Act 2014*. It must not be given away, sold, or released into the environment.

*Bryophyllum pinnatum* (resurrection plant, live-leaf) is not a restricted invasive plant. However, the Act requires everyone to take all reasonable and practical steps to minimise the risks associated with invasive plants under their control. This is called a general biosecurity obligation (GBO). This fact sheet gives examples of how you can meet your GBO.



Queensland  
Government

At a local level, each local government must have a biosecurity plan that covers invasive plants in its area. This plan may include actions to be taken on mother-of-millions. Some of these actions may be required under local laws. Contact your local government for more information.

## Description

Mother-of-millions are erect, smooth, fleshy succulent plants growing to 1 m or more in height.

All species form tall flower spikes in winter with clusters of bell-shaped flowers. Each species has a distinctive leaf shape, but all produce small plantlets along the edges of the leaves. These plantlets drop readily, develop roots and establish quickly to form a new colony.

*Bryophyllum delagoense* syn. *B. tubiflorum* and *Kalanchoe delagoensis* (common mother-of-millions, mission bells, Christmas bells) has grey-brown, fleshy, tubular-like leaves with up to seven projections at the tip of each leaf. The flowers are orange-red and occur in a cluster at the top of a single stem. Seeds can germinate for some years.

*Bryophyllum* × *houghtonii* syn. *B. daigremontianum* × *B. delagoense*, *Kalanchoe* × *houghtonii* (hybrid or crossbred mother-of-millions) has similar flowers arranged in a branched cluster at the top of the stem. Its leaves are boat shaped with thick stalks and notches along the edges of the leaves.

A third species, *Bryophyllum pinnatum* resurrection plant, live-leaf has yellow-green, oval, fleshy leaflets with wavy edges and up to five leaflets per leaf. Its flowers are yellowish-green, often tinged with pink, and occur in loose clusters on stalks growing at intervals along the upper portion of the stem.

## Life cycle

Mother-of-millions flowers in Winter and reproduces by seed and by tiny plantlets that are produced at the tips of its fleshy (succulent) leaves. Dislodged leaves and broken leaf parts can also take root and give rise to new plants.

## Methods of spread

Mother-of-millions is commonly spread by gardeners and in garden waste. The tiny seeds are probably wind and water dispersed and its leaves and plantlets may also be dislodged and spread by animals, vehicles, machinery, soil and slashers.

## Habitat and distribution

Native to Madagascar, these popular succulent garden plants have escaped cultivation and spread in various areas of Queensland. They have become a problem in pasture lands in the central highlands around Clermont, Emerald and Dingo, and the Burnett, Moreton and Darling Downs scrub regions. The plants establish well in leaf litter or other debris on shallow soils in shady woodlands, and often grow on roadsides, along fence lines and around old rubbish dumps. They can spread from these areas, especially in flood, and establish if pastures are run down.

They are adapted to dry conditions and can survive long periods of drought.

## Toxicity

These plants are toxic, especially their flowers, and occasionally cause a significant number of cattle deaths. When cattle are under stress or in unusual conditions they are more likely to eat plants that they would not normally eat. Shifting cattle to new paddocks, moving stock through infested rubbish dumps and wastelands, and reduction of availability of feed due to flood or drought can all contribute to cattle eating mother-of-millions and being poisoned.

Poisoned cattle show signs of dullness, loss of appetite, diarrhoea and heart failure. Some cattle may drool saliva or dribble urine. There are two responses to poisoning:

- acute—where cattle die within a day
- chronic—where cattle may take up to five days to die.

Some cattle may make a slow recovery if insufficient plant material was eaten.

Poisoned cattle must be treated within 24 hours of consuming the plant. The treatment is intense and needs to be given by a veterinarian, or under their direction, because of the drugs and materials used.

## Control

### Managing mother-of-millions

The GBO requires a person to take reasonable and practical steps to minimise the risks posed by mother-of-millions. This fact sheet provides information and some options for controlling mother-of-millions.

### Prevention and early detection

The best form of control is prevention. Always treat new infestations when small—do not allow invasive plants to establish. Control is not cheap, but it is cheaper to do it now rather than next year, or the year after. Proper planning ensures better value for each dollar spent.

Permanent control of mother-of-millions infested areas is best ensured by establishing more desirable plants in that location to compete successfully with future mother-of-millions seedlings and plantlets. This is best achieved through soil preparation, replanting, fertilising and using the area more productively.

Ensure scattered infestations and small dumping areas on properties are regularly checked and cleaned up. Day-to-day hygiene management will help prevent establishment.

Co-operative control upstream and downstream of problem areas will help prevent re-infestation from other areas.

To prevent poisoning, keep stock (especially hungry stock) away from infested areas until the plants are controlled.

## Mechanical control

For small areas, pull up plants by hand and burn on a wood heap. Alternatively, bag the plants and dump them in a bin, the contents of which are buried at council refuse tips rather than being recycled into mulch.

## Fire

When suitable (e.g. after grading firebreaks), burn infestations and the accompanying debris on which mother-of-millions plants thrive. This is the most economical form of control, encourages grass competition and lessens the problem for following years, requiring only spot spraying with selective herbicides.

## Biological control

The department is undertaking further research to identify potential biological control agents to support with management.

### South African citrus thrips

South African citrus thrips *Scirtothrips aurantii*, is a major pest of citrus in South Africa, and a pest of mango, macadamia, banana and grape in that region. It was found in Brisbane in 2002.

South African citrus thrips are not a recognized biological control agent under the Queensland Biosecurity Regulation 2016 and as such the South African citrus thrips and its host, mother-of-millions cannot be legally distributed.

The South African citrus thrip is quite widespread through Queensland's southern areas. It is unknown the distribution extent in other parts of Queensland. The thrip damages the outer tissue of the mother-of-millions plant and also lays its eggs under the outer tissue. Where high populations of thrips exist, the number of viable plantlets and flowers forming on mother-of-millions can be reduced.

The thrips populations vary from year to year, according to mother-of-millions populations and climate.

## Herbicide control

Before using any herbicide always read the label carefully. All herbicides must be applied strictly in accordance with the directions on the label. Where the addition of a wetting agent is recommended, always use a commercial wetting agent or surfactant.

Mother-of-millions may be controlled with herbicides at any time of the year, but infestations are easiest to see in winter when the plants are in flower. Treating infestations at this time of year also has the benefit of preventing new seeds from developing on common mother-of-millions.

Table 1. details the herbicides registered for mother-of-millions control.

## More information

For more information contact your local government or visit [biosecurity.qld.gov.au](http://biosecurity.qld.gov.au).

**Table 1. Herbicides for the control of mother-of-millions**

| Situation  | Herbicide   | Rate  | Comments   |
|--|---|---|--|
| Pastures and non-crop land   | 2,4-D acid (e.g. Affray 300)  | 7 L/1000 L water per ha<br>70 mL/10 L water     | High volume foliar spray (handgun). High volume foliar spray (knapsack).   |
| Pastures, rights-of-way and industrial   | 2,4-D amine 700 g/L (e.g. Amicide Advance 700)  | 360 mL/100L water                               | Handgun and knapsack only. Thorough coverage is essential. Use a surfactant (e.g. Nufarm Activator) (consult label).                               |
| Pastures, rights-of-way, non-crop land, forests, non-agricultural land and commercial and industrial areas | Triclopyr 300 g/L + Picloram 100 g/L (e.g. Conqueror) or<br>Triclopyr 300 g/L + Picloram 100 g/L + Aminopyralid 8 g/L (e.g. Grazon Extra) | 500 mL/100 L water<br>50 mL/10 L water          | High volume foliar spray (handgun, knapsack). Always add a wetting agent (e.g. BS-1000 or Chemwet 1000) at 100 mL/100 L water. Apply at flowering. |
|  | Fluroxypyr 200 g/L (e.g. Flagship 200)  | 600 mL/100 L water + surfactant (consult label) | Apply to seedlings and young plants before flowering.  |
|  | Fluroxypyr 333 g/L (e.g. Starane Advanced)  | 360 mL/100 L water + surfactant (consult label) |  |
|  | Fluroxypyr 400 g/L (e.g. Comet 400)   | 300 mL/100 L water + surfactant (consult label) |  |

### Notes

Thorough, even coverage of leaves and plantlets is necessary.

Note that many 2,4-D products are not registered for control of mother-of-millions in Queensland. Only use products registered for the purpose.

**Read the label carefully before use. Always use the herbicide in accordance with the directions on the label.**



*Bryophyllum x houghtonii* (left) and *Bryophyllum delagoense* (right)



South African citrus thrips damage to mother-of-millions

Fact sheets are available from [biosecurity.qld.gov.au](http://biosecurity.qld.gov.au). The control methods recommended should be used in accordance with the restrictions (federal and state legislation, and local government laws) directly or indirectly related to each control method. These restrictions may prevent the use of one or more of the methods referred to, depending on individual circumstances. While every care is taken to ensure the accuracy of this information, the department does not invite reliance upon it, nor accept responsibility for any loss or damage caused by actions based on it.

