



PRESS RELEASE

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WESTERN SYDNEY ON ALERT FOR TOXIC WEED BOOM AS EL NIÑO RAMPS UP

An intensifying El Niño weather pattern could supercharge the spread of poisonous weed Mother of Millions across Western Sydney this winter. Western Sydney Weeds Authority (WSWA) now urges residents to remain vigilant with reporting sightings.

The Bureau of Meteorology forecasts an unseasonably warm, dry winter for the region, with reduced rainfall and above-average temperatures heightening drought and bushfire risks. It is earmarked to be a 'Super El Niño', the strongest of its kind in 100 years – creating ideal conditions for drought-tolerant weeds to thrive.

Mother of Millions is a fast-spreading succulent originally introduced to Australia from Africa as a garden plant, but it has now invaded Sydney's bushland. The weed's name is derived from its ability to rapidly reproduce, and its peak flowering period from May to October coincides with these dry conditions.

Weeds like Mother of Millions cost Australia's farming sector approximately \$4 billion each year in productivity and stock losses. Highly poisonous to humans, pets and livestock, its toxins can accumulate in grazing animals and lead to heart failure within days. These potentially fatal ingestions increase during winter, with Mother of Millions flowers five times more poisonous than the leaves and stems.

WSWA's General Manager, Chris Dewhurst, warns that Mother of Millions' rapid reproduction makes early detection important.

"The potential Super El Niño will accelerate the spread of Mother of Millions across Western Sydney. This prolific succulent grows in very little soil and reproduces at an extraordinary rate through detachable 'plantlets' with thousands of long-lasting seeds," said Mr. Dewhurst.

"This makes it extremely difficult to control once established, which is why early detection and rapid response are critical."

WSWA says Mother of Millions is prevalent across the entire region it manages priority weeds in - including the Hills Shire, Hawkesbury, Blacktown and Penrith Local Government Areas (LGAs).



The organisation encourages Sydney residents to report any sightings through its online Weed Notification Form, which has already seen a 400% increase in submissions since launching four months ago.

“Our reporting tool has increased awareness in the community of priority weeds, and the number of reports we receive each month has quadrupled. This helps us to proactively wipe out new weed growth,” Mr. Dewhurst said.

Mother of Millions can be identified by its pencil-shaped, pale green to brown leaves with darker green patches and shallow grooves. It has distinctive clusters of orange-red flowers that form at the top of a single pinkish-grey stem.

It thrives in gravel and sandy soils and WSWA says residents should check for the weed along roadsides, fence lines, in bushland, around rubbish tips and abandoned properties, and along creeks and rivers where it can spread via floodwaters.

WSWA’s expert control team responds to reports quickly to treat infestations and monitor sites for regrowth. Mother of Millions can be treated with herbicide, or by hand-pulling and burning or solarising the plant material - with strict precautions taken to prevent plantlets from dropping.

“It’s so important that the community works together with us to manage Mother of Millions - especially during this period of extreme weather – and help prevent further damage to our primary industries and fragile natural landscapes,” Mr. Dewhurst added.

WSWA’s Weed Notification Form can be found at <https://wswa.nsw.gov.au/weed-notification-form>.

For more information on Mother of Millions, visit NSW WeedWise at <https://weeds.dpi.nsw.gov.au/>

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**Media information:
The PR Partnership**

Karen Gampenov | 0411 795 131 | karen@prpartnership.com.au
Stella Dearing | 0450 589 480 | stella@prpartnership.com.au