

Parthenium Awareness Week - August 16 - 22

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Abstract

Parthenium awareness week is being started on 17.08.2016 in the leadership of Dr.S. Rajan, Director, ICAR-CISH, Lucknow. An awareness programme about Parthenium identification, its harmful effects on biodiversity, human health and control was organized on 17.08.2016 under Mera Gaon Mera Gaurav (MGMG) programme at Primary and Middle school. To apprise the farmers about the harmful effects of the Parthenium and its management, various ICAR Institutes organized the “Parthenium Awareness Week” from 16th to 22nd August, every year.

Introduction

In India, it is noticed only from mid-fifties and is presumed to have been accidentally introduced by the import of wheat in Maharashtra during 1956. However, it's spread throughout the country has been very rapid with abnormal density. Most of the Indian states are currently under threat by Parthenium. It occupies over 5 million ha of land in the country. In the north-east, southern Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh, and almost all of Assam, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram and Tripura are vulnerable to Parthenium invasion. Parthenium (*Partheniumhysterophorus* L.) also known as star weed, carrot weed, white cap, white top, congress weed, vishapoondu , poisonous weed, Santa-Maria, famine weed, Gajar grass and dhanura etc.

Parthenium hysterophorus is a species of flowering plant in the family Asteraceae. It is native to the American tropics. Common names include Santa-Maria, Santa Maria feverfew, Gajar ghas, Dhanura, White top weed and famine weed. In India, it is locally known as carrot grass and congress grass.

Seedlings of Parthenium with egg-shaped leaves and covered in fine, white hairs. Older leaves become increasingly lobed and deeply divided and young plants develop into a rosette with a deep taproot system. Stems and leaves are covered in short, white hairs. Plants develop a bluish or greyish appearance. The flower-heads (4-5 mm across) are white or cream in colour and have five tiny 'petals' (ray florets) 0.3-1 mm long. They also have numerous (12-60) tiny white flowers (tubular florets) in



the centre and are surrounded by two rows of small green bracts (an involucre). It borne on short stalks, arising from the leaf forks. Flower heads become hard and brown as they mature. The seeds are striped grey to black and a narrow diamond shape, 2 mm long and flattened. Generally, only 4 seeds develop in each head. Parthenium can germinate, flower and set seeds within four weeks. Once established, it can survive even severe drought and frost conditions.

Objectives of this week

The primary goal of Parthenium Awareness Week is to inform individuals, communities, and authorities about the harmful effects of Parthenium and the need for collective action to combat its spread. Parthenium pollen is a major allergen and can cause severe respiratory issues, particularly in individuals with pre-existing respiratory conditions like asthma. This week highlights the potential health risks associated with exposure to Parthenium. Parthenium competes with crops for nutrients, water, and sunlight, significantly affecting agricultural yields. It is important to understand the economic impact of Parthenium on farmers and the food supply. This invasive plant can displace native species, leading to a loss of biodiversity in ecosystems. Raising awareness about the impact on local flora and fauna is a key aspect of the week.

Activities during Parthenium Awareness Week

- ❖ Educational workshops, seminars, and webinars are organized to provide in-depth knowledge about the characteristics of Parthenium, its impact on ecosystems, and best practices for its control.
- ❖ Public awareness campaigns are launched through various media channels such as television, radio, newspapers, social media, and public service announcements. These campaigns aim to inform a wider audience about the dangers of Parthenium and ways to tackle it.
- ❖ Pamphlets, brochures, posters, and digital resources are distributed to communities, schools, and institutions to increase awareness and understanding.
- ❖ Demonstrations of effective control methods, such as proper herbicide application and safe removal, may be conducted to showcase practical solutions for managing Parthenium.
- ❖ Community clean-up drives and awareness rallies may be organized to involve local residents and institutions in taking action against Parthenium.
- ❖ Renowned experts in the field of invasive species management and ecology might deliver talks to shed light on the significance of Parthenium and share insights into control.
- ❖ This initiative seeks to educate the public, communities, and relevant authorities about the negative impacts of this weed on agriculture, environment, and public health, as well as promoting strategies to manage and control its spread.



Parthenium Awareness Week has the potential to create a positive impact on various levels. Increased awareness can lead to more responsible land management practices, reduced spread of Parthenium, improved public health, and the conservation of native plant species and ecosystems.

Conclusion

Parthenium Awareness Week is an annual event observed from August 16 to 22, dedicated to raising awareness about the environmental, health, and agricultural impacts of the invasive weed plant known as Parthenium hysterophorus. This week aims to educate people about the dangers posed by this plant, its rapid spread, and the importance of controlling its growth to mitigate its negative effects. By fostering awareness and encouraging action, this week contributes to the mitigation of Parthenium's negative impacts on human health, agriculture, and the environment.