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# AGRICULTURAL GAZETTE

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## Plants which Produce Inflammation or Irritation of the Skin.

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1. Dr. J. B. Cleland, Principal Microbiologist of the Board of Health, Sydney, gives me the following note :—

“*Dermatitis from handling Noogoora Burr.*—Dr. Hittmann, of Wee Waa, has informed me that about February, 1917, after the extensive floods of the Namoi River, a number of men were engaged in cutting down this burr and other noxious weeds in proximity to the river banks. Five cases of a weeping eczema or dermatitis occurred in his practice during this period, three being in burr-cutters and two in fisherman tramps who camped under the bridges of the river amongst the burrs in following their occupation. In January, 1918, the river was again in flood. Two cases of this same dermatitis again occurred, both being in burr-cutters, one of whom had been infected in a similar way in 1917. In the previous year this man had come in with a dermatitis, had been cured, and had then worked again amongst the burrs and was reinfected. The persons attacked attribute the complaint to this particular burr.”

The Noogoora Burr is *Xanthium strumarium*, and a figure and some notes on the weed will be found in this *Gazette* for 1899, page 1043.

2. Recently in Tasmania my attention was drawn to the fact that skin irritation befalls the hop-pickers when gathering the hops, and a man to whom I spoke stated that he cannot follow the occupation for that reason. He added that few people suffer as he did. Other people informed me as to the occurrence of “hop-rash,” but I did not see a case.

On speaking to Mr. W. Grant, Superintendent of the Outer Domain, who has had a good deal of experience with the hop-plant in England, he said that the hop-rash was well known to him, and he attributed it to the rough hairiness of the bine (the stem), which mechanically abraded the skin.

The Hop is *Humulus lupulus* L., and the scales of the fruit (the hops) are, when ripe, covered with yellow glandular hairs, which secrete a bitter principle called lupulin, and it may be that these hairs, getting into the circulation, cause this irritation.

3. The Stinkwort, *Inula graveolens* (for a general description of this weed see this *Gazette*, July, 1917, p. 493). Unfortunately this weed, which is such a notorious pest in South Australia, is becoming increasingly abundant in New South Wales, and the following phase of it is very little known in our State. Following is the first published reference known to me.

In the *Journal of the Bureau of Agriculture of Western Australia* for 30th June, 1897, p. 1312, is an account by the late Mr. R. Helms of the distressing symptoms of inflammation of the skin undergone by him after handling Stinkwort flowers, and there is also a note that it is reputed that sheep and

horses running amongst Stinkwort may suffer similarly. Mr. Helms attributes the irritation to the barbs of the pappuses; it may be that the real irritant is the aromatic resinous oil which permeates the plant.

A good many landowners have put men on to pull up Stinkwort, and one hears of such experiences as the following from time to time. The following is from the Wagga district in June, 1917:—

“Poisoning symptoms have manifested themselves in the cases of several men who were engaged in the eradication of Stinkwort. In one case the sufferer was in a hospital for a week. Some time after he had been helping in the eradication of Stinkwort his arms began to swell, and one eye and a knee were also affected. The use of gloves is considered advisable to prevent contact of the weed with the skin.”

A correspondent in the Harden-Cootamundra district wrote as follows in April of the present year:—

“I would also like to know if you are acquainted with the fact that men who pull this weed with their hands suffer from a form of blood-poisoning about the arms and face, and sometimes even under the clothing. I have a man here who put in a week or ten days pulling this weed, and he is now laid up suffering from this about his arms, face, and neck. This is the second case which has come under my notice. I saw a man here last autumn who had lost all the skin from his hands, arms, face, and neck, which he said was due to Stinkwort poisoning.”

No man should pull up Stinkwort without leather gauntlets. As with most irritant plants, it is found that some men are immune or nearly so, while others are more or less susceptible. With gauntlets the risk is reduced to a minimum, but care should be taken to keep the gloves in repair, as it is wonderful how insidious the poison is. A common remedy is to dab a damp rag on carbonate of soda or washing soda; this usually gives relief, and in bad cases medical aid should be sought. The annoying part of the trouble is that it is most persistent, and in bad cases may distress a sufferer for weeks and even months.

4. *Senecio Hectori* J. Buch., from the West Coast of New Zealand, belonging to the same family, was also recorded by Mr. Helms as causing skin irritation.

My readers will remember that *Olearia viscidula* Bth., also from the same family (Compositæ), and also with a sticky surface, also causes severe irritation of the skin. (See this *Gazette* for July, 1913, p. 911.)

One must be careful in collecting evidence that seems to indicate that a plant is an irritant to the skin. In the series of papers on this subject which have appeared in the *Gazette*, it must be borne in mind that the irritating substances referred to (oil, glandular hairs, oxalates, &c.) are parts of the plant itself. But many plants are mere accumulators of dirt, which may cause irritation to broken skin. No one would accuse a rose-bush of being a poison plant, but I have known many cases of people engaged in pruning, or even plucking a rose, getting irritating sores, sometimes very severe, through an old thorn which had accumulated filth, by means of the dust of the air, tearing the skin and inoculating the wound with dirt at the same time.