

SALT CEDAR

(Tamarix ramosissima)

Drawing from: Arizona Ranch, Farm, and Garden Weeds, by Kittie F. Parker. Arizona Agricultural Extension Circular 265, 1958.

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Salt cedar or tamarisk (*Tamarix ramosissima* — formerly *T. pentandra*) is a member of the Tamarisk Family (Tamaracaceae). The 54 species within this genus are native to western Europe, the Mediterranean region, India and Northern China. This species along with four others was introduced into the southwestern United States as ornamentals and have since escaped from plantings and become well established. For this reason they are sometimes mistaken for native plants.

Like other members of the genus *Tamarix*, *T.*

ramosissima is a shrub or small tree. It ranges from 5 to 20 feet tall. The branchlets are slender with minute appressed scaly leaves that are glabrous, grayish-green and narrowly pointed. About 1/16-inch long, they are so crowded on the stems that they often overlap one another. Although the general appearance is that of an evergreen, the leaves are deciduous. The flowers are small but numerous and vary in color from deep pink to nearly white. They are about 1/16 inch in diameter, crowded in many slender spikes up to 2 inches long, and are less than 1/25-inch long and have a tuft of fine hairs at the tip. The bark, reddish-brown and fairly smooth when young, becomes ridged and furrowed with age.

Salt cedar is abundant in bottomlands in some areas, occupying the banks of streams, drainage washes and irrigation ditches. It is drought resistant and grows on all types of soil, including those that are alkaline or salty. Originally this plant was not looked upon as a weed problem but was considered a desirable ornamental. It was also used as a check on erosion or as a windbreak. However, this plant has spread over large areas since its introduction, due to the fact that its seed is air and water born. The seedlings are apparently able to survive best on sites made bare by flooding or other means; they cannot tolerate competition on soils not underlain with a shallow water table.

Once established, salt cedar is difficult to kill by cutting or burning. It resprouts from both roots and stems and becomes bushier after each resprouting. This plant must be controlled in places where it clogs drainage courses and rivers with its dense growth, making regulation of such streams difficult. In addition, salt cedar consumes large quantities of water each year. This is an important economic factor in the Southwest, where the availability of water determines areas that can be irrigated or used domestically. Much effort has been made to control this plant in several states.

Old plants are difficult to kill with foliage spray. The best practice is to remove the old growth by mechanical means (or by fire) and then to spray the new growth in three to six months. Silvex (2,4,5-TP) is the most effective herbicide that is being used currently. The areas must be retreated as often as is necessary to keep surviving plants under control and to kill new seedlings.

Old plants can be killed by basally spraying them with esters of 2,4-D or 2,4,5-T applied in diesel oil. Applicability of basal sprays, however, is confined to situations where the plants are limited or the areas are small.