

# WEEDS INFORMATION SHEET

# ST JOHN'S WORT



**St John's wort** – *Hypericum perforatum* is a native of Europe, Asia and North Africa, and is a weed in 21 countries including Australia. It was brought to Australia in 1875 as a garden plant and is now widespread in pastures, water catchment reserves, forests and national parks. It causes photosensitization in sheep, cattle, horses and goats, resulting in loss of condition, low productivity and in extreme cases, death.

Photo's by M.Edmonds

**DESCRIPTION** – There are two main strains of St John's Wort in NSW. The narrow-leaved strain is the most widespread and has leaves 7-9 mm wide, late-flowering tall plants, thin stems and small seed capsules. The broad-leaved strain has leaves 10-12 mm wide, early flowering short plants, thick stems and large seed capsules. Leaf width is measured at the 6th node on the flowering stem. Flowers are bright yellow, in a forked, leafy panicle. They are 15-30 mm in diameter and have five petals, five sepals, many stamens and a three-celled ovary. The petals, sepals, leaves, stamens and stems all have black oil glands which, when crushed, produce the red hypericin known as 'St John's blood'. The leaves also have translucent oil glands which give them a perforated appearance when held against strong light. Fruit are a sticky three celled capsule, splits open on ripening in summer to release 30-70 seeds (up to 30 000 per plant). Seed are small (1 mm x 0.5 mm, 7 million seeds per kg). It is cylindrical and brown, with many-pitted seed coat. Seeds need mild temperatures, light and rainfall before they will germinate. They can remain viable for up to 12 years. Stems are hairless, sometimes with a reddish tinge, and have two opposite longitudinal ridges. Leaves on the flowering stem are 7-12 mm wide and 20-30 mm long. They are opposite one another on the stem and have no stalk.

