



# Saltcedar (*Tamarix ramosissima*, *Tamarix chinensis*, *Tamarix parviflora*)

aka Tamarisk

**Provincial Designation:**  
Prohibited Noxious

## Overview:

Saltcedars are deciduous, loosely branched shrubs or small trees and native to Asia. They were introduced in the 1800s and used as ornamentals, to establish wind breaks, and to stabilize soil in riparian areas. They reproduce by seed but can also sprout vegetatively from buried stem or branch pieces. Saltcedar produces massive quantities of tiny seeds which have a short viability period but can germinate quickly in a broad range of conditions. It develops a deep tap root (as deep as 5m) to access groundwater and can tolerate extended periods of drought once established. Saltcedar has replaced large tracts of native cottonwood/willow stands in the US and has lower wildlife value and greater water uptake than native tree stands.

It tolerates high levels of salinity and this salt accumulates among leaf scales during evapotranspiration. The resulting leaf litter increases salinity of the soil over time, making it unsuitable for native vegetation.

Invasion by saltcedar is linked to disturbance/removal of native vegetation and/or alteration of natural flooding patterns by human activities<sup>3</sup> such as dams (stabilization of water levels, increased sedimentation). Seedlings are poor competitors and intolerant of flood scouring.<sup>1</sup> Saltcedar develops dense stands which accumulate sediment, increasing saltcedar habitat and altering stream channels and floodplains.

Several species of *Tamarix* (including *T. ramosissima*, *T. pentandra*, *T. chinensis*, *T. parviflora*) were introduced to North America. Species identification is difficult because some of the species are very similar in appearance and hybridization is common.<sup>3</sup>



ABOVE: Saltcedar foliage (photo by Steve Dewey, Utah State University)

BELOW: Saltcedar infestation near a stream

## Habitat:

Saltcedar grows in many soil types but prefers fine-textured soils. It tolerates a wide range of saline or alkaline soils, but is intolerant of shade. It mainly inhabits the margins of water courses such as rivers, streams, irrigation canals, lakeshores.



## Identification:

**Stems:** A few to several stems per plant. Young stems are slender, smooth and reddish-brown – the bark on older stems is furrowed.

**Leaves:** Leaves are bright green, diamond shaped, scale-like, alternate, overlapping - strongly resembles cedar foliage – and 0.5 to 3 mm long. Leaf edges are thin & dry and turn yellow-orange in autumn.

**Flowers:** Flowers are small, pale pink to white, and borne in finger-like clusters which are 2 to 5 cm long.

**Seed:** Seed capsules are 3-4 mm long and the petals usually retained on the capsule. Seeds are less 0.5 mm long with a tuft of 2 mm hairs at one end.

## Prevention:

Saltcedar is available for sale under the names Pink Cascade and Summer Glow through both catalog and some local nursery retailers. The tiny seeds are dispersed by wind and water. Because of their small size they are difficult to detect in soil,<sup>2</sup> making contaminated soil another possible pathway for spread. Seedling infestations are easiest to control – established infestations will require significant funding and effort over multiple years.

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## Saltcedar (*continued*)

### Control:

**Grazing:** Cattle and goats will eat tamarisk but trampling from livestock in riparian areas would be detrimental. Goats would require herding to protect native species. *Invasive plants should never be considered as forage.*

**Cultivation:** Root plowing has been used in the desert U.S. on large, dense stands.<sup>3</sup>

**Mechanical:** Cutting alone is ineffective, as saltcedar re-sprouts vigorously. The method most employed is herbicide applied to cut stumps with the best results from autumn applications. Hand pulling of new, young plants can be effective. Burning has been used in the U. S. and re-sprouts treated with herbicide.

**Chemical:**<sup>5</sup> Triclopyr and imazapyr have been used for cut-stump treatments, and imazapyr and/or glyphosate for foliar applications.<sup>2</sup> Picloram has been used on frilled tree bases.<sup>3</sup> Herbicide applications in riparian areas require certified applicators and must meet provincial Codes of Practice. Consult your local Agricultural Fieldman or Certified Pesticide Dispenser for more information.

**Biological:** The Tamarisk leaf beetle (*Diorhabda elongata*) is a defoliator which has been released in the U.S. since 2001 and is beginning to have a substantial impact.<sup>4</sup>

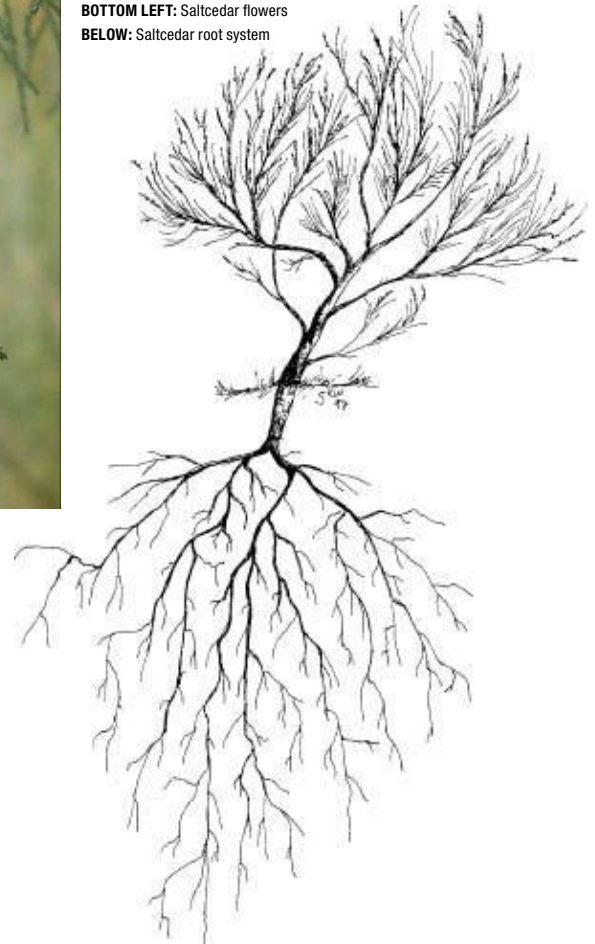


ABOVE: Saltcedar in a B.C. yard (photo by D. Townsend)

MIDDLE LEFT: Saltcedar leaves

BOTTOM LEFT: Saltcedar flowers

BELOW: Saltcedar root system



1 Ecology of *Tamarix ramosissima*. 2007. Global Invasive Species Database. <http://www.issg.org/database/welcome/>

2 McClay, A. 2007. Risk assessment fact sheet for saltcedar, *Tamarix ramosissima*.

3 Carpenter, A. 1998. Element Stewardship Abstract for *Tamarix ramosissima* Ledebour, *Tamarix pentandra* Pallas, *Tamarix chinensis* Loureiro, *Tamarix parviflora* De Candolle, Saltcedar, Salt cedar, Tamarisk.

4 Tamarisk Coalition <http://www.tamariskcoalition.org/tamariskcoalition/Index.html>

5 Always follow the product labels. The use of pesticides in any manner not published on the label or registered under the *Minor Use of Pesticides* regulation constitutes an offence under both the *Federal Pest Control Products Act* and *Alberta's Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act*.