

Alligatorweed ALPH

Alternanthera philoxeroides (Mart.) Griseb.

Synonyms: *Achyranthes philoxeroides* (Mart.) Standl., alligator weed

From: Miller, James H. and Steve T. Manning. [working title] An Expanded Nonnative Invasive Plants of Southern Forests: A Field Guide for Identification and Control. Asheville, NC: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, Southern Research Station. DRAFT - August 2008

Family: Amaranthaceae

Plant. Perennial, evergreen forb, with hollow round stems and opposite leaves at pronounced nodes. Erect stem tips produce stalked white clover-like flowers in upper axils during summer, but no fruit or seeds reported. Trailing or floating stems form entangled mats to 3 feet (90 cm) deep over 100s of square feet (meters) on water and adjoining land. Horizontal jointed stems up to one inch (2.5 cm) in diameter and 30 feet (10 m) long readily branch and root at nodes in water to 6.5 feet (2 m) deep or when next to soil.

Stem. Shiny, succulent and round, often reclining, hollow at internodes with a diaphragm at nodes. Pale green with whitish swollen nodes tinged pinkish to purplish to brownish above with age. Nodes topped with a hairy fringe when young, along with hairy lengthwise minute inter-nodal grooves, becoming hairless with age.

Leaves. Opposite from swollen nodes, somewhat succulent and shiny, long lanceolate in summer, 0.8 to 2.7 inches (2 to 7 cm) long and 0.4 to 0.8 inches (1 to 2 cm) wide, tapering to the stem with no petiole, being shorter and blunter in winter. Green to blue-green above with pale green midveins and fine hairs. Whitish green and hairless beneath.

Flowers. April to October. Stalked, 0.5 to 3 inches (1.2 to 8 cm) long, in upper leaf axils, small white rounded clover-like cluster of tiny flowers, 0.5 to 0.7 inches (13 to 18 mm) wide, each flower with five minute petals (actually sepals) and yellow centers of anthers.

Fruit and seeds. None yet produced in the U.S.

Ecology. Forms mat infestations in shallow water, shores, and spreading upland from marshes, lakes, rivers, streams, canals, and ditches, and wet agricultural soils. Grows in both fresh to slightly brackish waters and on sandy to clay soils. Produces deep mats that prevent other plants from germinating in the spring and overtops aquatic and upland plants to damage wetland wildlife habitats. It spreads rapidly by stem fragments moved by water that root at nodes.

Resembles other *Alternanthera* species, both nonnative and native, which have similar flowers while none are stalked like alligatorweed. Also resembles the many knotweeds that inhabit wet soils and shorelines that have alternate leaves.

History and use. Native to South America and introduced into the U.S. about 1900. Invading from south to north.