



## *Laportea aestuans* (L.) Chew West Indian woodnettle

*Laportea aestuans*, the West Indian woodnettle or stinging nettle, is a new introduction to Hawai'i. This plant should be controlled because of its potential to cause skin irritations, and its invasive characteristics. According to the Hawai'i Pacific Weed Risk Assessment<sup>1</sup> the West Indian woodnettle scored as a 10- "likely to be invasive in Hawaii and on other Pacific Islands as determined by the HPWRA screening process, which is based on published sources describing species biology and behavior in Hawai'i and/or other parts of the world." This weed is considered an agricultural weed; it is spread by accidental dispersal, water dispersal, and prolific seed production. *L. aestuans* was shown to be a host for root-knot nematodes (*Meloidogyne* spp.), which are pests in banana plantations, and is also a known host of African cassava mosaic virus<sup>2</sup>.

In April 2012, the Hawai'i Department of Agriculture found the West Indian woodnettle growing at several O`ahu nurseries. We suspect that this plant may have been introduced with potted plants, or possibly from potting media imported from outside the state.

### Distribution

*Laportea aestuans* is widely distributed in tropical Africa, tropical Asia<sup>1</sup>, and throughout the western and eastern hemisphere tropics and subtropics, Central America, the West Indies, India, Sumatra and Java<sup>3</sup>. In the US, *L. aestuans* can be found in California and Florida<sup>4</sup>- both likely sources of Hawai'i's introduction.

### Description

Annual herb up to 1 m tall, with both stinging and nonstinging hairs; stem fleshy and slightly woody. Leaves are alternate and broadly oval with serrated margins; petiole is reddish in color. Flowers are greenish to yellow in color and occur in clusters on a 4-10 cm long peduncle. This herb may be found growing in shaded areas.

### Control

Small infestations may be hand pulled using gloves, mature plants with seed should be bagged to control seed dispersal. Larger infestations may be controlled with a foliar herbicide in accordance with the label. Please notify the **Plant Pest Control Branch** at **973-9538** if you see this weed.

### References

1. Hawaii Pacific Weed Risk Assessment. Clifford, P. & Chimera, C. Available at: <http://www.hear.org/wra/> [accessed 10 August 2012].
2. Brink, M. 2009. *Laportea aestuans* (L.) Chew. In: Brink, M. & Achigan-Dako, E.G. (Editors). Prota 16: Fibres/Plantes a fibres. [CD=Rom]. PROTA, Wageningen, Netherlands. Available at: [http://database.prota.org/protahtml/laportea%20aestuans\\_en.htm](http://database.prota.org/protahtml/laportea%20aestuans_en.htm).
3. Chew, W.-L. 1969. A monograph of *Laportea* (Urticaceae). Gard. Bull. Singapore 25: 111-178.
4. USDA, NRCS. 2012. The PLANTS Database. National Plant Data Team, Greensboro, NC 27401-4901 USA. Available at: <http://plants.usda.gov> [accessed 21 August 2012].



Figure 1. *Laportea aestuans*. Photos by HDOA



Figure 2. Densely covered with stinging hairs (up to 1 mm) and soft glandular hairs.



Figure 3. Leaves alternate, margin toothed, flowers unisexual; male flowers scattered in the inflorescence; mixed with females