

Environmental Weed Alert.

Mother-in-Laws Tongue

Sansevieria trifasciata



Description: Mother-in-Laws Tongue is a native of tropical Africa where it has been commonly used as a fibre. It was introduced to Australia as an ornamental and has fast established itself as an environmental weed invading our native bushlands. It is particularly common in reserves adjoining the older residential estates. Unfortunately there are many cultivars of Mother-in-Laws Tongue and they are still widely used in outdoor gardens and as indoor plants. The weed problems begin when it spreads from the garden or is dumped illegally in native bushlands where it will eventually form large spiky clumps blocking native vegetation from growing and surviving. The sap of Mother-in-Laws Tongue is very poisonous and can cause the tongue to swell if you come in contact with it – hence the plant name. Mother-in-Laws Tongue is a succulent, invasive herb that produces erect lance shaped leaves of between 50-120cm in height and 3-9cm wide. The dark green leaves have bands of grey/green and yellow colour and each plant produces between 1-6 leaves growing from a rhizome under the ground. The leaves can be quite pointed and sharp at the tip. It can produce small tubular green flowers along the leaves and small fruit (about 8mm wide) that ripens to an orange colour containing two light brown seeds. Mother-in-Laws Tongue spreads from seed dispersing from the plant via gravity and wind, from the rhizome growing underground and from vegetation dumpings. Some attractive native alternatives to this weed include the Blue Flax Lily (*Dianella caerulea*), Mat Rush (*Lomandra hystrix*), Native Ginger (*Alpinia caerulea*) and the River Lily (*Crinum pedunculatum*).

Control: Mother-in-Laws Tongue can be removed by carefully digging up all the rhizomes under the leaves and composting all plant parts in a sunny position in your garden or disposing of them legally through your Council waste management service. This will be easier after rain when the soil is wet and follow-ups may be required.