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Need of the hour: Insects to control parthenium weed

By Chandrika Mago/TNN

New Delhi: The Mexican beetle just can't do it alone. Agricultural scientists are hoping to import some more friendly insects which can help rip into parthenium, a weed which has spread like wildfire through most of India since it slunk in with imported foodgrains half a century ago.

Parthenium first came into Pune, today it's just about everywhere. This alien which causes allergies has reached upto Jammu, feeding on the fact that it has no natural enemies in India. The beetle was called to arms, multiplied into millions and began its work across India — but it needs help. N T Yaduraju, director of the National Research Centre for Weed Science in Madhya Pradesh, says Australia is using half a dozen other insects to control this ubiquitous weed. "We are trying to import other insects," he says.

Insects can't just be imported; there are guidelines on this and tests have to be done. Trials will take upto five years. Any new alien insect meant to control parthenium can't be released commercially before five or six years, says Yaduraju. But a start needs to be made now. Where insects don't work, the beauty of flowers might. French marigold can help keep the weed in its place.

Yaduraju says scientists are also working on a three-year, Rs 70-lakh government project to demonstrate large-scale, integrated management of parthenium. There are many ways to control the weed, which grows along roads, on vacant sites, in no man's land and now, even in orchards, fields and open forests — colonising land, crushing other species before it.