

WHITTLESEA WEED FACT SHEET

Blackberry (*Rubus fruticosus*)

WEED OF NATIONAL SIGNIFICANCE
DECLARED NOXIOUS WEED

REGIONALLY CONTROLLED IN PORT PHILLIP EAST



City of
Whittlesea



ISSUE

Known to many people from both city and rural areas, blackberries have been a problem in Australia for a very long time. In agricultural areas, blackberries can invade paddocks, degrading pastures and restrict access to livestock. Often the presence of blackberry in the middle of a farm paddock can indicate the presence of foxes whose diet consists of these wild fruits. Blackberries growing along fence-lines and under trees have often been spread by birds that have expelled the seeds after digestion. Blackberries can also provide harbour for rabbits and foxes.

In bushland areas, blackberries can rapidly spread by climbing up and through shrubs and small trees, whilst sprawling across the ground to smother wildflowers and grasses. Blackberries often grow rampantly in moist areas and along the banks of rivers and creeks to form impenetrable barriers to the water's edge. In severe cases, the water cannot be seen at all and the only hint is the thick infestation of Blackberry. In these areas blackberries are often spread further downstream by the movement of water.

LOCAL SCENE

Blackberries can be found growing on many properties including lifestyle/hobby farms to traditional farms, as well as bush blocks. They have even been found in suburban areas affecting a growing number of residential properties.

As blackberry fruit is predominantly spread by birds and foxes, all properties are vulnerable to invasion. However, areas with higher rainfall within the City of Whittlesea are at higher risk, as blackberry prefers to grow in wet areas, rivers, creeks and even drainage lines.

This hardy weed has a long history of being a thorn in the side of many local farmers and blackberry management has been an ongoing task for many generations.

Within the City of Whittlesea, blackberries are commonly found in:

- Doreen
- Humevale
- Kinglake
- Mernda
- Woodstock
- Yan Yean
- scattered areas within Eden Park
- properties which have watercourses

PROBLEM LAND MANAGEMENT PRACTICES

Land management practices which contribute to the spread of blackberry include:

- Slashing, especially when blackberry canes are actively growing
- Using dirty machinery that is contaminated with soil and weedy material
- Not treating isolated plants along fence-lines, creeks and rivers or under trees and shrubs
- Failing to implement an adequate fox control program

Unlike many weeds which can be prevented from entering properties through monitoring what comes through the farm gate i.e. stock, machinery and fodder, blackberries are a weed that can fly literally under the radar. As the seeds can be spread by birds and foxes, even the most vigilant landowner will inevitably have blackberries pop up from time to time.

Left unmanaged, infestations can rapidly increase in size to become costly and difficult to control. To prevent this problem, blackberry levels can be held at bay if regularly managed, often just with the use of a pick or mattock to grub out new germinants.

Refer to the City's 'Seasonal Guide to Weed Management' for more information on integrated weed control options. Visit www.whittlesea.vic.gov.au (key word search: seasonal guide) or email Sustainability@whittlesea.vic.gov.au for your copy of the Guide.

You may also contact Council's Sustainable Land Management Officer on (03) 9217 2493 for further advice or for a copy of the Guide.

CONTACTS

Australian Pesticide and Veterinary Medicines Authority (APVMA)

www.apvma.gov.au
Tel. (02) 6272 5852

City of Whittlesea Sustainability Planning Unit

www.whittlesea.vic.gov.au
Tel. (03) 9217 2493

Department of Primary Industries (DPI)

www.dpi.vic.gov.au
Tel. 136 186

DPI Chemical Information Service

www.dpi.vic.gov.au
Tel. (03) 9210 9379

The Blackberry Task Force

Tel. 136 186

Printed on 100% recycled paper using low environmental impact ink

IDENTIFICATION TIPS

Flower: Delicate white flower, often with a light pink blush in spring-summer. Generally the flowers have five petals, usually growing in small bunches (see Photo 1).

Fruit: Small, roundish fruit/berries usually the size of a five cent piece. Starting off green and gradually maturing to a dark purple colour (see Photos 2 & 3). Although the berries look superficially like a single fruit, each berry consists of numerous small, round fruits encasing a seed. These seeds are approximately the size of a sesame seed. Scattered between these small fruits are tiny bristles.

When picked from the plant, each fruit will have a small hollow where the fruit attached to the calyx (tiny leaves) between the stems, similar to the small leaves and stem at the top of a strawberry.

Leaves: Dark green leaves often turning a reddish-purplish in autumn (see Photo 4), with leaf fall following to expose the tangled mass of canes(stems). Leaves have serrated edges and prominent veins. The underside of the leaves have a downy white-light green appearance and thorns (small hooks) along the middle vein.

Stems: Long green to brown-purplish stems (canes) approximately pencil thick, covered in hooked thorns which look similar to rose bush thorns (see Photo 5).

Form: Sprawling canes (stems) which can often reach over 3 metres in height depending on local climatic conditions. The canes regularly arch over to the ground where the tip of the cane takes root to become another plant, often called a 'daughter-plant'. In high moisture areas such as along watercourses like the Plenty River, blackberries have formed to become a thick impenetrable tangled mass (see Photo 6).

FURTHER READING:

Department of Primary Industries, Frankston (October 2004) *Landcare Notes: Blackberry- Identification LC0188*

Department of Primary Industries, Frankston (October 2004) *Landcare Notes: Blackberry - Management LC0381*

Keith Turnbull Research Institute, Frankston & Weeds CRC- Bruzzese, Mahr & Faithfull (September 2000) *Best Practice Management Guide- Blackberry, Rubus fruticosus aggregate*

DISCLAIMER

The advice contained in this publication is intended as a source of information only. Always use chemicals in accordance with manufacturer directions on the product label or in Material Safety data sheets available from the manufacturer. The City of Whittlesea and its officers do not guarantee that the publication is without flaw of any kind or is wholly appropriate for your particular purposes and therefore disclaims all liability for any error, loss or other consequence which may arise from your relying on this information.

