

Sweet Briar (*Rosa rubiginosa*)

DECLARED NOXIOUS WEED

REGIONALLY CONTROLLED IN PORT PHILLIP EAST



ISSUE

Sweet briar is a woody weed which impacts on agricultural productivity and degrades native vegetation across south-eastern Australia. Spreading where there is little competition or grazing pressure, it can quickly degrade valuable pastures. Like many other woody weeds it provides minimal fodder value for livestock and takes up valuable paddock space, reducing the overall property carrying capacity. Heavy infestations will also impede the movement of grazing animals and may cause serious injury to stock and other animals. It also provides refuge for rabbits and other pest animals which cause significant impacts, especially to livestock and native fauna.

With the ability to spread quickly and develop into dense thickets, sweet briar can readily smother native grassland vegetation. It will also out-compete native trees and shrubs including many of the Australian

wattles, which provide a vital food source and habitat for native fauna including possums and nectar collecting birds.

LOCAL SCENE

Locally known as either briar, briar rose or wild rose, sweet briar can be found throughout the municipality, with large infestations being located in the southern reaches.

Sweet briar was initially planted for ornamental purposes during early European settlement and has now escaped to become a serious woody weed. Many paddocks on the rich volcanic plains are dotted with this thorny weed. There are also large areas of land along local rivers and creeks that have become tangled with sweet briar making passage along the banks impossible.

Within the City of Whittlesea, sweet briar is commonly found in:

- Epping
- Donnybrook
- Doreen
- Mernda
- Woodstock
- Wollert

PROBLEM LAND MANAGEMENT PRACTICES

Some land management practices contribute to the spread of weeds. Landowners can unintentionally spread sweet briar by:

- Leaving paddocks unmanaged or under-grazed
- Not undertaking control works along fence-lines and creeks which often provide sources for new weed recruitment.
- Failing to implement a pest animal control program targeting foxes, as they commonly eat the fruit of sweet briar and spread the seeds in their faeces.
- Not implementing an integrated weed control program using more than one method.
- Moving cut sweet briar after physical removal, rather than burning the cut material on-site.

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

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IDENTIFICATION TIPS

Sweet briar can be easily identified at any stage of the year by its thorn stems. Being part of the rose family, sweet briar has similar characteristics to varieties found in the home garden. To ward off this weed, become familiar with the following key identification features.

Flowers: Light pink flower with 5 petals and yellow stamens (reproductive organs) in the centre (see Photo 1). Flowers are approximately 4cm in width and have a slight perfume. The flowers are often located at the end of the branch, flowering in bunches of up to 4 flowers.

Fruit: The flowers are followed by oval, slightly prickly rose hips (fruit) approximately 1.5cm in length. The hips start off green and gradually turn a rich orange-red colour (see Photo 2). As the hips age they usually dry on the plant and become hardened. Within each hip there are numerous cream coloured seeds which are covered in tiny irritating golden bristles.

Leaves: Roundish, mid-green leaves with slight serrations along the margin (edges). Leaves grow in groups often referred to as a leaflet, with up to 7 leaves along each stem (see Photo 3). The underside of each leaf is often whitish, with tiny hooks along the mid-vein. As roses are deciduous, the leaves will gradually change colour to yellow during autumn and then drop off. It is common for leaves to have black spots, which is a fungus which can be transmitted to garden roses.

Form: Deciduous, branchy shrub usually approximately 1.5m high, comprised of numerous thorny stems originating from the ground. The stems are green in colour when young, changing to brown as they age. Each stem also develops numerous branches all of which are covered in hooked thorns (see Photos 4 & 5).

FURTHER READING:

Keith Turnbull Research Institute, Frankston (April 1998)
Landcare Notes: Sweet briar LC0194

W.T. Parsons & E.G. Cuthbertson, CSIRO Publishing (2001)
Noxious Weeds of Australia- Second Edition.

Muyt, A. R.G & F.J Richardson (2001) *Bushland Invaders of South-east Australia: a guide to the identification and control of environmental weeds found in South-East Australia*

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