

Invasive Weeds

A Good Advice Guide for Gardeners

The Garden Clubs of Australia Inc.

It is reported that Charles Darwin germinated some fifty different kinds of weeds from the soil which he scraped from the feet of a shot pheasant.

The problem of weeds is always with us.

This problem, however, pales when compared with invasive weeds which are the most serious of threats to Australia's natural environment and primary production industries. Weeds can have potential significant adverse impact on Australia's productive capacity, natural or physical resources, genetic diversity and ecological processes. Property managers are now required by law to control declared weeds. The cost of weeds to agricultural and pastoral industries in Australia is estimated at \$4 billion per year and at least a similar cost to the natural environment.

Do you remember hearing about the introduction of the cactoblastis moth to help eradicate prickly pear?

Acknowledged as one of the greatest biological invasions of modern times, the introduction and subsequent spread of prickly pear into Queensland and New South Wales had infested millions of hectares of rural land by the 1920s, rendering it useless for agriculture. Prickly pear proved so difficult and costly to control by chemical and mechanical means that enormous areas were simply abandoned by their owners.

(Source: https://www.daf.qld.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0014/55301/IPA-Prickly-Pear-Story-PP62.pdf)



Above: The dreaded Prickly Pear (*Opuntia stricta*). Courtesy: agric.wa.gov.au

Since then, there are 15 species of cacti that have attained pest status in Queensland.

Such is the problem of invasive weeds that this document can only be an introductory guide for gardeners. A list of suggested, more detailed readings is given at the end of this guide and gardeners are encouraged to explore these with particular reference to their own State or Territory. For example, some states now divide invasive weeds into two categories: Declared Weeds and Non-Declared Weeds to emphasise the significant concern over certain species.

The Garden Clubs of Australia Inc. supports the fundamental basis of Australia's biosecurity strategy; we encourage all gardeners to play their part as members of the Australian community in addressing the problem of invasive weeds in your local area.

Throughout Australia weeds are spreading faster than they can be controlled. Weeds typically produce large number of seeds which spread into the natural and disturbed environment via wind, waterways, human activities, vehicles, machinery and other animals.

There are more than 28,000 plant species introduced into Australia from all over the world. Some introductions have been accidental but most exotic plants have been introduced as garden plants, pasture grasses or other horticultural plants. Of the ten new weeds recorded in Australia each year, two thirds are escaped garden plants.

Some simple tips for gardeners:

Poor disposal of green waste, such as dumping garden waste into bushland, is one of the main ways that weeds escape from gardens and start growing in bushland, reserves and water-



Above: Pampas grass (*Cortaderia selloana*). Courtesy: kidspot.com.au





Above: Aggressive Madagascan Fireweed (*Senecio madagascariensis*) competes strongly with pasture species and is toxic to livestock. Courtesy: citynews.com.au

ways. Some of the ways that you can help minimise the spread of weeds through responsible disposal of garden waste include:

- Regularly remove weeds from your garden and use a deep mulch to prevent them from germinating or recurring.
- Protect yourself carefully when using weed sprays or chemicals and specifically follow the guidelines on the container.
- Never use weeds as a mulch as seeds can easily survive the heat of composting.
- Remove any seedheads before placing into your compost. Cover your compost so that seeds cannot be distributed by wind or animals.
- Never dump garden waste 'over the back fence' or in bushland or reserves.
- Dispose of weeds that are already seeding or readily able to reproduce vegetatively, including through suckers and bulbs, by placing them in a black plastic bag, sealing it and 'baking it' in the sun for many days until destroyed.
- Remove seed heads from plants before they have time to mature and disperse.
- Compost or dispose of garden and green waste in council green waste collections or by carefully transporting it to your council's green waste tip.
- Always cover trailers when transporting plant material to prevent seeds and other live plant material falling off.
- Consider carefully what plants you buy for ponds and aquariums and never dump aquarium water or contents down drains or into waterways.
- Report any weed infested vacant blocks to the local council.
- Encourage your garden club to hold a weed information session to learn the names of weeds and then recognise them when gardening.

Plant selection:

Some of the worst weeds found in our native bushlands have escaped from gardens. When invasive plants escape from gardens, they can reproduce and aggressively invade natural habitats, crowding out and threatening native plants.

Some of the ways that you can help are:

- Get to know the weeds in your local area. Contact your local council or ask your local garden retailer for a list of common garden escapees.
- Don't include problem plants in your garden design. Choose safe alternatives, including sterile forms of species that would otherwise set seed. Your local garden retailer may be able to advise you about these.
- Where possible, choose indigenous plants for your garden designs. Indigenous plants are plants that occur naturally in your local area.



Above: Moth Vine (*Araujia sericifera*).

The Nursery and Garden Industry Association has produced extensive information for gardeners appropriate for individual States and Territories that lists invasive weeds and plants and safe alternatives that gardeners might choose. (See **Grow Me Instead** - <http://www.growmeinstead.com.au/>)

The Australian Government Department of Agriculture and Water Resources has produced a major document **Australian Weed Strategy 2017 – 2027** which The Garden Clubs of Australia Inc. recommends to gardeners. The document suggests the following responsibilities for community groups such as Garden Clubs in addressing the problems of invasive weeds in Australia:

... to lead, promote and participate in collective action based on industry needs at a local, regional or national level to mitigate impacts of established weeds of national significance on community assets provide leadership and direction regarding weed risk minimisation represent community interests in weed management assist with data collection and information exchange support and build public awareness about weed issues.



Above: Highly invasive Boneseed (*Chrysanthemoides monilifera*).
Courtesy: Eurobodalla Shire Council

Identifying weeds in your local area:

The Australian Weed Strategy document lists 20 weeds of national significance which are subject to specific plans for eradication. Weeds such as climbing asparagus fern (*Asparagus plumosus* species), blackberry, capeweed, gamba grass, water hyacinth are included in this list.

Gardeners should not lose sight of the 28,000 plant species introduced to Australia, many of which are invasive weeds in some States and Territories and yet are regarded as garden plants in others, e.g. agapanthus, arum lily, Japanese honeysuckle, blue periwinkle, camphor laurel, Cootamundra wattle, English ivy, *Verbena bonariensis*, etc.

Sources of further information about weeds in Australian States and Territories:

ACT	https://www.act.gov.au/browse/topics/environment/weeds-and-pests
Australian Government	http://www.environment.gov.au/biodiversity/invasive/weeds/
Kangaroo Island	https://www.naturalresources.sa.gov.au/kangarooisland/plants-and-animals/pest-plants
Lord Howe Is.	https://www.lhib.nsw.gov.au/environment/environmental-programs/weed-eradication-program
Norfolk Island	http://regional.gov.au/territories/publications/files/Department of Agriculture Pest and Diseases survey 2015.pdf
NSW	https://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/biosecurity/weeds
NT	https://nt.gov.au/environment/weeds
QLD	https://www.daf.qld.gov.au/business-priorities/plants/weeds-pest-animals-ants/weeds
SA	http://www.pir.sa.gov.au/biosecurity/weeds_and_pest_animals/weeds_in_sa
TAS	https://dipwe.tas.gov.au/invasive-species/weeds
VIC	http://agriculture.vic.gov.au/agriculture/pests-diseases-and-weeds/weeds
WA	https://www.agric.wa.gov.au/pests-weeds-diseases/weeds/declared-plants
Weeds Australia	http://weeds.ala.org.au/



Above left: Blackberry (*Rubus fruticosus*). **Above centre:** Wild Fennel (*Foeniculum vulgare*) forms large, deep roots that branch out. Courtesy: Eurobodalla Shire Council. **Above right:** Lantana (*Lantana camara*).



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