



CARING
FOR
OUR
COUNTRY

Caring for Our Country
Granite Flora-Recovery in Action
Weeds: Boosting Wildflowers and Wildlife through Control
Workshop - Saturday 28 November 2009 - Bungawarra Winery, Ballandean

The Top Ten Weeds of the Granite Belt and Their Control
presented by Rob Simcocks

What is a weed? Put simply, it is a **plant growing where it is not wanted**. For example, Agapanthus is a common garden plant in many locations in Australia where it is desirable because of its beauty and hardiness. In other areas it is a garden escape and threatens some of our natural bushland. It is the population explosion of a particular plant that makes it a weed, as it can take over, pushing out native plants that also feed our native animals, thereby creating a chain of adverse reactions affecting the biodiversity of our natural and cultivated environments.

In presenting this workshop I have selected what, in my experience, are the top 10 problem weeds specific to the Granite Belt. I have listed them below in order of importance (threat).

These ten weeds are relevant to the cleared and cultivated areas around the more pristine areas of natural bush where our wildflowers grow.

Remember there is great variation between blocks of land to the north, south, east and west of this district plus variations based on different land treatments over time. You may have problems with a weed not mentioned here. This list is a starting point.

My pick of the top ten problem weeds of the Granite Belt, in order are:

- **BLACKBERRY** *Rubus fruticosus*
- **COOLATAI GRASS** *Hyparrhenia hirta*
- **LOVEGRASS** *Eragrostis curvula*
- **COREOPSIS** *Coreopsis lanceolata*
- **SANDBURR** *Senchrus incertus*
- **NUTGRASS** *Cyperus rotundus*
- **WHISKEY GRASS** *Andropogon virginicus*
- **PATERSON'S CURSE** *Echium plantagineum*
- **ST JOHN'S WORT** *Hypericum perforatum*
- **CANADIAN FLEABANE** *Conyza canadensis*

Other weeds of lesser significance, but still worth mentioning, are: Stinking Roger, Cobblers Pegs, Twiggy Mullein, Common Evening Primrose, Scotch Thistle, Inkweed, Curious Weed and Skeleton Weed.

If you have weeds invading the edges of your natural bush, the best control is to follow the Bradley method of Bush Regeneration. A recommended read is *Bringing Back the Bush* by Joan Bradley.

The basic principles of the Bradley Method are:

1. Work **outwards** from good bush areas **towards** areas of weeds.*
2. Make **minimal** disturbance to the environment.
3. **Do not** overclear your property.

**Working from areas of weeds inwards (by spraying, clearing or burning) can produce a secondary weed outbreak (eg. spraying lovegrass can produce a secondary infestation of Fleabane) so always work outwards from good bush areas towards the weed areas.*

You may be lucky and have none of the main weeds on your property. Either way, vigilance is required to prevent the establishment of new weeds.

The method which a weed or weeds invade your property is called a “vector”. Here are a few main vectors that give them a free ride to a paddock near you:

- Council and private slashers,
- Graders (various grasses have been named grader grass for good reason),
- Dozers and other road plant,
- Ride-on mowers
- Livestock movement from one property to another
- Cars and other vehicles.

Council has fitted blowers to slasher decks to try to keep seed spread localized. **Always blow or wash decks and dozers** at point of unloading, prior to work commencing, and then monitor that site for any outbreaks. It is false economy to chase weed outbreaks later. Nutgrass can be spread on cultivating equipment so be sure to clean your gear thoroughly before using bringing it onto your property.

People often like to mow outside their property along the roadside with their ride-on mowers. This is one way seeds such as Coolatai and Lovegrass can be brought back inside the property. Once again, we advise you to **clean the deck of your ride-on at a place where you can monitor outbreaks**.

Moving livestock from place to place, and even the neighbour’s dog coming over to your place for a visit, are possible weed vectors, as is closing your car door along a weed-infested road (trapping weeds and their seeds which then fall out and plant themselves when you get home). Driving your vehicles around other farms, particularly in wet, muddy conditions is another way to bring seeds home – they travel home with you in the mud on your car’s tyres and wheel arches.

Weeds tend to love growing in areas of cultivation and clearings and the natural bush seems to have a magical ability to keep weeds out. With regular checks, vigilance and maintenance it is possible to completely eliminate some weed outbreaks. With others, keeping the numbers down may be all that can be achieved.

Whether you use sprays or not depends on your personal beliefs and aims. If you do use spray, there are many situations where a minimal amount of spray will suffice, or where mechanical methods (such as hand digging and pulling, whipper-snipper and slashing) will prove to be more effective.

Spraying can initiate secondary outbreaks. Cutting back weeds at the right time can often let grasses grow and dominate. If you have small *Coreopsis* outbreaks, for example, digging them out with a screwdriver can be very effective although you may have to do this every year for several years to beat the seed pool.

CONTROLLING THE TOP TEN

- **Blackberry** is another major weed here, with the seeds being easily spread by birds. It is important to try and stop the larger plants setting fruit. On smaller properties it may be possible to chip out plants but burning and ploughing often encourages it. Grazon is an effective control - follow recommended spray rates, spray all plants and follow up by spraying young plants. This can take years to beat the seed pool but you can break the cycle and win. Make sure you stop plants fruiting.
- **Coolatai grass** is the current public enemy number one as it is believed to be able to out-compete Lovegrass. It too is an African import and first established itself southwest of the Granite Belt at Coolatai near Ashford in NSW. It is currently out of control in many areas west of the highway and is making inroads (or is that edge-roads) east of the highway. It has russet coloured seed clusters similar to thin prairie grass clusters. These hang out sideways and slightly downwards from the top of the stems. The seeds are fine with a long, thin hair, making them ideal to stick to vehicles, particularly in the wet. The stems are russet green and strawlike. This weed has the potential to be disastrous for the district, particularly on grazing land, so recognizing it and dealing with it is important. A stronger amount of Glyphosate than used for Lovegrass plus TASKFORCE seems to be what is required.
- **Lovegrass** is also a major problem. Chip out scattered plants at first then spray them with Glyphosate and TASKFORCE at the recommended rate. Remember when using a pre-emergent like Task Force to spray wide enough to wet the seed drop zone.
- **Coreopsis** inhabits ungrazed land. Ploughing and sowing to pasture, then grazing is one approach. Coreopsis is a broadleaf, so talk to a spray supplier for the best product if this is the way you want to go. Scattered outbreaks can be monitored by spotting the first yellow flowers and digging plants out with a screwdriver and bagging in case seed is viable. I have eliminated four outbreaks at home, but it took three years of vigilance.
- **Sandburr** and **Nutgrass** inhabit farmed soils and are difficult to eradicate. Putting lime on the soils has been shown to help with Sandburr. The spiky seeds help its spread. A spray and cultivate routine early in the season could prove effective. Spraying Nutgrass kills the shooting plant but not the nodules. Talk to your local Ag rep for the best advice regarding timing and the best products.
- **Whiskey Grass** also inhabits ungrazed land, so ploughing, sowing and grazing is one approach. If spraying, treat the same as for Lovegrass. Scattered outbreaks of plants can be chipped.
- **Paterson's Curse** has an easily identifiable rosette when young, with blue flowers when mature. It grows much taller than Blue Heliotrope. It seeds prolifically so early action will save a lot of work later. Chipping and burning scattered outbreaks before seed drop is a good plan. Larger outbreaks may require spraying with a broadleaf spray such as Grazon, or Dicamba.
- **St John's Wort** is becoming a major problem in some grazing areas. It grows around 400-500mm high with small yellow flowers with reddish-brown pods in tight horizontal clusters as opposed to the spread out look of fireweed. Treat with Grazon at the recommended rate as early as possible; noting that often it is the flower that lets you find it, by which time it may be too late to stop seed production.
- **Canadian Fleabane** is mostly a weed of lesser significance but can establish itself in monocultures in the right conditions. Spraying for Lovegrass often brings on a major outbreak of Fleabane. It is a major weed of dryland farming out west and is developing resistance to Glyphosate. Because of this, spray early during the rosette stage using Glyphosate with either Grazon or Dicamba at the recommended rate. Always wear protective eyewear and clothing when spraying!

More info is available on the internet. Check out NW Weeds and the DPI sites. Follow the recommended spray rates and WEAR APPROPRIATE PROTECTIVE GEAR, but do try chipping out plants if they are scattered outbreaks.

SAFETY

Material Safety Data Sheets (MSDS) of the chemical herbicides I have recommended are available at the workshop for viewing and discussing and are also readily available on the internet.

IMPORTANT! WHEN USING CHEMICALS:

- **ALWAYS** read the Material Safety Data Sheets for the chemicals you plan to use, particularly the toxicity and first aid sections,
 - **ALWAYS** wear Personal Protection Equipment (PPE), such as protective eyewear and appropriate protective clothing, gloves, etc when applying the chemicals to your plants.
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Remember ...

- to protect your natural bush areas, work from the bush towards the weed infestations,
- make minimal disturbance,
- do not overclear,
- stay vigilant and be observant - look for strange, new plants with different leaves and flowers.

Learn the names of weeds and teach your children. Historically weeds live with us and most are benign. Some, like Fat Hen, are even edible.

Lurking in our gardens are weeds with names like French Catchfly, Scarlet Pimpernel, Green Crumbweed, Common Peppercress, Shepherds Purse, Radium Weed and Clammy Goosefoot!

It really is a fascinating world of weeds out there.

Feel free to contact me for weed info, weed ID and problems,

Rob Simcocks

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RECOMMENDED READING:

Weeds – An illustrated botanical guide to the weeds of Australia by B.A.Auld and R.W. Medd

Bringing Back the Bush by Janet Bradley.

COOLATAI GRASS



COOLATAI GRASS - Our latest threat. Please learn to recognise it. It is currently growing on road edges right next to the bitumen. Take care if it is near your property entrance. The base of the plant is green with top half russet.