

Blackberry (*Rubus fruticosus* species aggregate)

Weed management guide

Weed type
Shrub

April 2023

www.lls.nsw.gov.au/regions/central-west



In NSW, weeds are regulated by the NSW Biosecurity Act, 2015. All land managers have a General Biosecurity Duty to contain the spread of weeds

“General Biosecurity Duty means that any person dealing with plant matter must take measures to prevent, minimize or eliminate the biosecurity risk (as far as is reasonably practicable).”

The Regional priority for Blackberry is containment. The whole of the Central West is an exclusion zone except for the core infestation areas of Warrumbungle and Coonamble Shire Council areas. In order to achieve this, Land Managers are asked to: *Whole region: The plant should not be bought, sold, grown, carried or released into the environment. Mitigate the risk of new weeds being introduced to their land. Exclusion zones: Eradicate from the land and maintain. Core infestation areas: Reduce impacts to priority assets.*

For further information, contact your local Biosecurity (Weeds) Officer via Central West Local Land Services or visit NSW WeedWise.

NSW WeedWise



Habit and description

Blackberry or specifically, European blackberry (*Rubus fruticosus* species aggregate) is a collective name for different blackberry species; your local weed officer can help in identification. Plants in this group are characterized by a perennial shrub up to 2-3 metres tall with stems that grow up to 7 metres long. The stems (also called canes) are covered in sharp prickles and vary in colour (green, purplish or red) depending on how much sunlight it gets. Its leaves are arranged alternately along the stem in clusters of 3-5. The leaves are darker on the top-side and lighter on the underside, and is also covered by short, curved prickles. Its white or pink-coloured flowers are found at the end of the canes and clustered like a cylinder or a pyramid. These develop into dark-coloured berries that contain about 20-30 seeds each. The roots of the Blackberry plant are woody and can penetrate deep into the ground (up to 4 metres). Other plants in the genus *Rubus* can be misconstrued as belonging to *R. fruticosus* group, like *R. idaeus* (Raspberry) and the native *R. parvifolius*.

Blackberry is found throughout Australia and often thrives in disturbed areas. The main limiting factor to its proliferation is rainfall and it prefers areas with more than 700 mm annual rainfall (Evans et al., 2007).



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Reproduction and spread

Blackberry reproduce sexually (fruits and seeds) and asexually (vegetative/other plant parts). Fruits are generally dispersed by birds, mammals and by water. Soils contaminated by Blackberry seeds can also be transported by bushwalkers and other recreational users. Once canes produced from the first year (primocanes) droop and touch the ground, it sprouts roots and become new “daughter plants” (Thornhill, 2023).

Impacts

Agriculture



- Blackberry is unpalatable to livestock and once it takes over pastures, it lowers the productivity of the land.
- It also forms thickets which hinders the movement of livestock to other areas of the pasture as well as watering holes.
- In orchards, Blackberry infestation hinders the movement of people and machinery.

Native vegetation



- Blackberry is a weed of National Significance (WoNS) in Australia (NSW Department of Primary Industries, 2017)
- It outcompetes native vegetation especially shrubs and ground vegetation, as well as preventing the germination of trees and shrubs.
- Blackberry thickets reduce habitat to most native fauna and harbor some pest animals such as foxes and rabbits.
- Dense infestation provides fuel for bushfire.

Management

Chemical



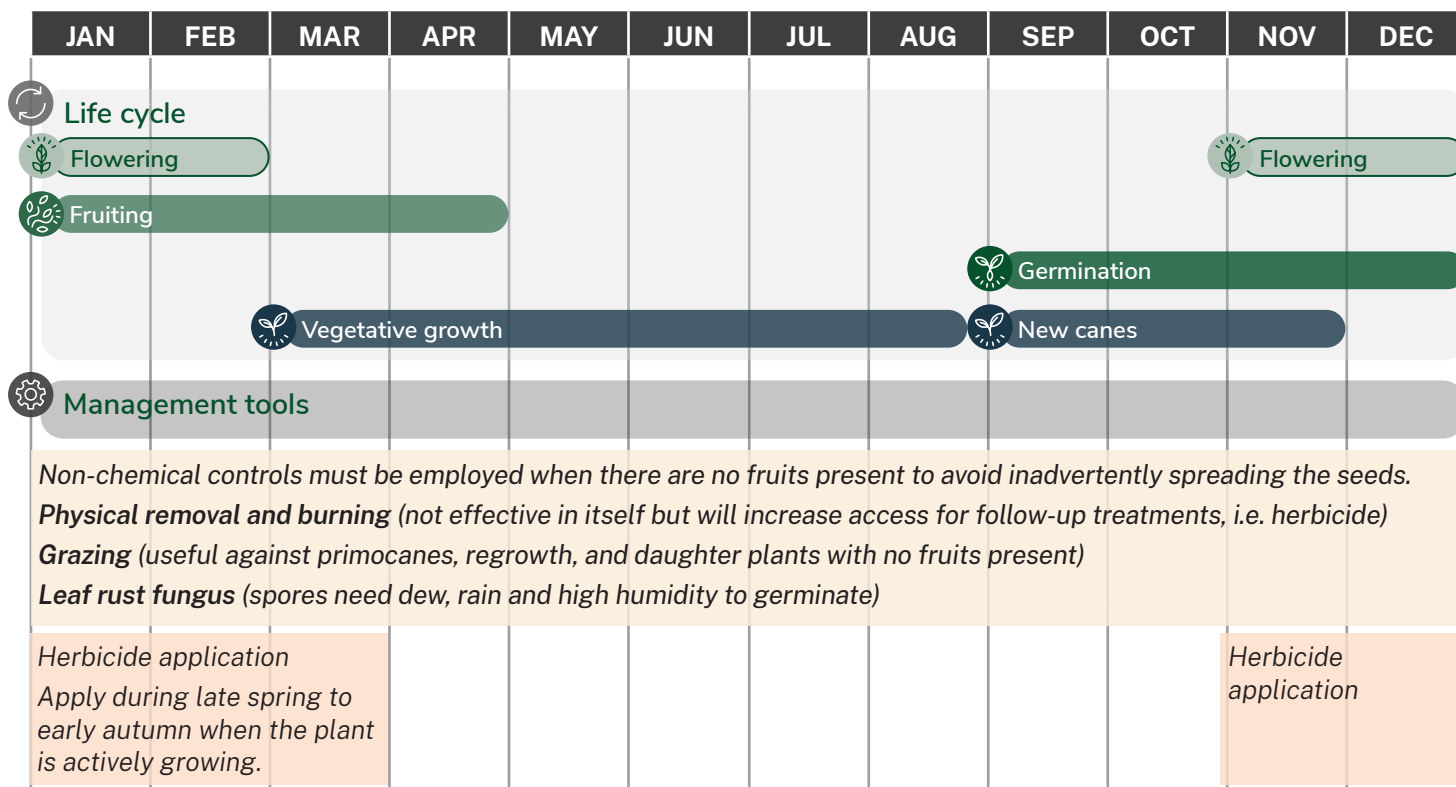
- Herbicides are more effective against first year plants; more established thickets will need additional treatments.
- It is ideal to wait for regrowth of at least 1 metre after slashing/burning before applying herbicide.
- Seek the guidance of an experienced Weeds Officer for expert advice on herbicide use.
- Visit www.apvma.gov.au for a list of registered products, product labels and permit requirements.
- NSW DPI (2018) provides a list of recommended herbicides for the control of Blackberry at <https://weeds.dpi.nsw.gov.au/Weeds/Details/18>

Non-chemical



- Physical removal like slashing alone is not effective and must be done in conjunction with other controls, like herbicide application. It creates more access to the plant but triggers regrowth.
- Keeping a well-stocked pasture helps in preventing Blackberry invasion.
- Among livestock animals, goats are the most effective control that can be employed to graze Blackberry. Goats should be deployed to plants that have not yet bear fruit or against regrowth.
- Burning will not kill the plant but can make it more accessible for follow-up treatment.
- A leaf rust fungus (*Phragmidium violaceum*) has been deployed against Blackberry in Australia. Please contact your Weeds Officer on the use of this organism.

Management calendar



Optimal control options may vary depending on your location and climate. Consult an experienced Weeds Officer based in your local government area for control methods suited to your conditions.

NSW WeedWise



All herbicides must be used in accordance with the herbicide label and permit requirements.

Further information

For more information on your general biosecurity duties, visit www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/biosecurity.

For the best guidance on how to meet this duty on your property, contact your expert Weeds Officer at your local council or via Local Land Services www.lls.nsw.gov.au/regions/central-west.

References

- Thornhill, A. (2023) *Rubus fruticosus* aggregate. In: *Weeds Australia*. Centre for Invasive Species Solutions, Canberra. <https://profiles.ala.org.au/opus/weeds-australia>.
- NSW DPI. (2018). NSW WeedWise. <https://weeds.dpi.nsw.gov.au/Weeds/Details/18>
- Evans, K.E., Symon, D.E., Whalen, M.A., Hosking, J.R., Barker, R.M. & Oliver, J.A. (2007). Systematics of the *Rubus fruticosus* aggregate (Rosaceae) and other exotic *Rubus* taxa in Australia. *Australian Systematic Botany* 20: 187-251.
- NSW Department of Primary Industries. (2017). *Weeds of National Significance*. Retrieved from NSW WeedWise: <https://weeds.dpi.nsw.gov.au/WeedListPublics/CategoryResults?showImages=True&categoryId=1&pageTitle=Weeds%20of%20National%20Significance>

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