MALLEE CATCHMENT facts

Bridal creeper
(Asparagus asparagoides)

Above and left: Bridal creeper infestations in the Mallee. Photo: Murrayville Landcare Group.

Bridal creeper *(Asparagus asparagoides)* is an aggressive and highly invasive weed that has serious impacts on the environment. It is found throughout the Mallee region, with close to four thousand infestations reported. It is regarded as one of the worst weeds in Australia and has been listed as a Weed of National Significance (WoNS).

Problem

Weeds of National Significance are priority weeds that pose threats to primary industries, land management, human or animal welfare, biodiversity and conservation values.

Bridal creeper invades bushlands of southern Australia and is a major threat to shrubs and groundcover plants. Its climbing stems and foliage smother native plants, while its thick mat of underground tubers impede the root growth of other plants and prevents seed establishment.

The weed can also impact upon primary industries, such as citrus, orchards and forestry.

History

Bridal creeper originates from southern Africa and was brought to Australia as a garden plant around 1857. The plant was very popular in floral arrangements,

At a glance

- Bridal creeper is a Weed of National Significance (WoNS);
- It is a major threat to bushlands of southern Australia;
- Dense infestations can smother native plants, impede root growth and prevent seed establishment.

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especially bridal bouquets, due to its dainty white flowers and heart-shaped green leaves.

Within 50 years of introduction, Bridal creeper was a common weed in many areas of southern Australia.

Description

Bridal creeper is a climbing vine with sharp pointed, shiny green leaves. The twisting stems grow up to 3m in length.

A mass of small, white flowers appear in the winter, followed by small green berries in the spring. These berries ripen to red and contain two or three seeds. There can be more than 1000 berries per square metre.

The plant typically loses its leaves in the summer months, but its extensive root system of tubers and rhizomes allows the plant to survive and reshoot with autumn rains. This underground mat of tubers and rhizomes actually makes up 90% of the plant's biomass.

Dispersal

Seed is primarily dispersed by birds feeding on the berries and later excreting the seeds at a new location. Rabbits and foxes can also eat the fruit and disperse the seeds.

Seeds remain viable for up to two years. Germination occurs in autumn and winter, in leaf litter and soil depths of up to 10cm.

Control options

Biological control

In South Africa, Bridal creeper is an uncommon plant kept in check by its natural enemies. Three of these enemies have been released into Australia: the leafhopper (*Zygina sp.*), rust fungus (*Puccinia myrsiphylli*) and leaf beetle (*Crioceris sp.*).

Above: Bridal creeper infestation. Photo: Murrayville Landcare Group.

Each biological control works by attacking the leaves of the Bridal creeper plant, reducing photosynthesis and therefore the growth of the plant and its tubers.

In the Mallee, the leafhopper can be effective but is not readily available at the time of publishing. Rust fungus, while effective in other regions, has difficulty reaching the required infestation for control due to the dry climate. The leaf beetle has seen little success throughout Australia.

Chemical treatment

Herbicides are the most effective method of control. However, because bridal creeper often grows in areas of native vegetation, it is particularly important to take care while spraying.

Physical removal

Physical removal is not effective unless all the rhizomes are dug up and destroyed. This may be possible for new, small infestations, or as a follow-up to herbicide control.

What you can do to help

Land managers can help prevent the spread of weeds on their property by:

- Maintaining vehicle hygiene to reduce spread of weeds by machinery and equipment;
- Minimising ground disturbance; and
- Monitoring their property to detect new weeds early and eradicate them before they become established.

Further information

For more information on Bridal creeper, contact the Mallee Catchment Management Authority on 5051 4377.

References

CRC for Australian Weed Management, Nov. 2004, Weed Management Guide – Bridal Creeper (AA), fact sheet.

CSIRO (2011) Management and Control of Bridal Creeper, http://www.csiro.au/Outcomes/Safeguarding-Australia/Bridal-Creeper-Biocontrol.aspx.

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