

# Pest plant – Blackberry

(*Rubus fruticosus*)

Fact sheet March 2017



Image: Colin G. Wilson

## What is it?

Blackberry is one Australia's most important and widespread weeds. The name 'blackberry' covers at least 14 different but closely related species, some of which may be hybrids, which have become naturalised in Australia.

Blackberry is a perennial shrub with prickly stems (canes) that take root where they touch the ground. Often forming thickets up to several metres high, it varies from sprawling to almost erect. The plant is semi-deciduous and sheds its leaves in winter.

Blackberry is a *Weed of National Significance* and is a declared weed under the Natural Resources Management Act 2004 (NRM Act).

## What does it look like?

### Stems

The stems are erect and arched, and can grow up to 7m long. They may be green, purplish or red in colour. They are generally thorny and hairy.

Young canes emerge from buds on the woody root crown each spring and grow very rapidly (50–80 mm a day).

### Leaves

Leaves are usually dark green on the upper side, and lighter green on the underside often with whitish hairs. They are alternate, consisting of 3 – 5 toothed ovate leaflets. The leaf veins and stalks are covered with short prickles. Leaves are usually shed in winter.

### Flowers

Flowers form in clusters at the ends of short branches. They are white or pink, 2–3cm in diameter with five petals.

### Seeds & Fruit

Berries change colour from green to red to black as they ripen and are 1 – 3cm in diameter. They consist of an aggregate of fleshy segments each containing 1 seed.

Berries may contain as many as 80 seeds and plants may produce up to 13,000 seeds per square metre. Seeds are light to dark brown, somewhat triangular, 2 – 3mm long and deeply and irregularly pitted.

### Roots

Most roots occur in the top 20cm of soil but can grow to 1m deep. There is a well-defined crown at ground level.



## History

Blackberry species in Australia originate from Europe and were introduced in the 1840's. Blackberry was promoted as a source of edible fruit, for the control of soil erosion along streams and as a hedge plant. By the 1880's it was becoming recognised as an important weed in NSW and Victoria.

## Why is it a problem?

Blackberry is highly invasive in nature, spreading along the banks of watercourses, roadsides, pastures, orchards, plantations, forests and bushland throughout temperate Australia. It grows impenetrable thickets that exclude other vegetation.

It can dominate pastures and native ecosystems as well as invade disturbed sites in urban areas. In badly affected areas, dense infestations often fill whole gullies and can extend for a width of tens of metres along both sides of streams.

It has economic and environmental impacts, and control costs are often high. On farms Blackberry reduces pasture production, restricts access to water and land, and provides food and shelter for pest animals.

The accumulation of dead canes and leaves can be a fire hazard.

Blackberry can result in a substantial decrease in property values where heavy infestations occur.

The tourism industry can be affected by reducing the natural attraction of the bush and hindering recreational activities where thickets prevent access to natural features.

## Distribution

Blackberry is widespread across Australia occurring in all states including Tasmania but with exception to the Northern Territory. It thrives in a wide range of habitats, and can occur at any altitude in Australia. It is restricted to temperate climates with an annual rainfall of at least 700 mm. It is common along roadsides, streambanks, neglected areas, farmlands, orchards, forest plantations and bushland.

## How is it spread?

Seeds in berries are easily spread when fruit is eaten by birds, mammals, water, vehicles, bushwalkers or by moving soil from one place to another.

Blackberry can take over large areas in a short time through tip-rooting. Trailing first-year stems take root at the tips where they touch the ground and form a new plant. This generally occurs in autumn and daughter plants can occur up to 7m from the original crown. Daughter

plants become independent when the connecting stem dies approximately 1year later.

Blackberry patches can also increase in size by root-suckering where lateral roots sucker up to 2m from the edge of clumps forming daughter plants. Suckering is likely to be stimulated if clumps are sprayed with herbicides.

## How do we control it?

Blackberry management programs must be planned and sustained over a number of years. Management activities need to incorporate spread prevention, control and reduction of existing infestations, and rehabilitation of treated areas to prevent reinfestation.

A combination of control methods have been used by NRKI weed control officers including burning, slashing, grazing, grubbing, and chemical spraying.

The best time to spray blackberry is during flowering and fruiting periods, but spraying can start before flowering and extend long after fruiting with effective results.

Tip-rooting can be prevented if blackberry is mown or grazed in autumn to prevent first-year stems taking root, or if there is continual disturbance to stems.

Biological control has been used on the mainland; Rust being the most successful biocontrol so far. Biological control will not eradicate blackberry, but can slow the rate of spread and allow more time for control by other means. It is not used on Kangaroo Island.

For advice on chemical control techniques contact the Natural Resources Centre in Kingscote or download the *Weed control handbook for declared plants in South Australia* for advice on chemical control [http://www.pir.sa.gov.au/biosecurity/weeds\\_and\\_pest\\_animals/weeds\\_in\\_sa](http://www.pir.sa.gov.au/biosecurity/weeds_and_pest_animals/weeds_in_sa).

## Declarations

The following sections of the NRM Act apply to Blackberry on Kangaroo Island:

- 175 (1) Cannot import the plant to South Australia**
- 175 (2) Cannot transport the plant or anything carrying it**
- 177 (1) Cannot sell the plant**
- 177 (2) Cannot sell any produce / goods carrying the plant**
- 182 (2) Landowner must control the plant on their land**
- 185 NRM authority may recover costs for control of weeds on roadsides from adjoining landowners.**



# For more information

## **Kangaroo Island Natural Resources Centre**

37 Dauncey Street, Kingscote

P (08) 8553 4444

E [kinrc@sa.gov.au](mailto:kinrc@sa.gov.au)

[www.naturalresources.sa.gov.au/kangarooisland/](http://www.naturalresources.sa.gov.au/kangarooisland/)

Team Leader Pest Management: 0429 616 414

Animal and Plant Control Officer: 0418 708 557



**Natural Resources**  
Kangaroo Island



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