



### Facts and figures

Invasive plants are often referred to as weeds or invasive garden plants. They are plants that impact on human health, agricultural production or the balance of the environment.

Irresponsible plantings in gardens and poor garden management has led to some disastrous situations around Australia. Many household garden plants have become huge environmental and economic issues. Even garden plants in many gardens still have the potential to affect the surrounding environment dramatically, especially if they are neglected, allowed to set seed and spread beyond the borders of the garden in which they were planted.

Most of the plants that are now recognised as being invasive weeds started out as introduced garden plants, and there are many more waiting the chance to join them. Our parks are entangled with them, our roads verges and reserves infested by them and they occupy valuable productive land that can no longer be used for these purposes. In fact they increase the cost of basic foods such as meat and vegetables in Australia, so ultimately weeds are costing us all.

When many plants were introduced into Australia, it wasn't understood that they could become such a large pest issue, but it remains a fact that at least 65% of our weeds were first planted as garden plants before they escaped into the environment. Certain plants are now prohibited or declared, which means they are illegal under State or federal law, however there are many more garden plants that are also damaging to the environment and have escaped from garden beds. Many of these plants have not yet have been banned from sale or may be banned but still remain growing (and spreading) in household or public gardens. People need to be aware of the danger to the environment that could be lurking in their own backyards.

### Who is protecting Australia's environment?

Weed invasion is one of Australia's most serious and expensive land degradation problems, and one of the least known and understood by the Australian community.

Globally, weeds are the second biggest threat to biodiversity, behind habitat loss through clearing. Most indiscriminate clearing has been stopped in much of Australia

There are more than 2400 weeds plants in Australia that are currently impacting on our environment and have the potential to have an even greater impact if left un-managed. Plants like rubbervine currently infest an area of about 350,000 square kilometres—an area larger than the state of Victoria. Some individual weeds like lantana cost the grazing sector alone over \$104 million dollars each year.

### Problems caused by invasive weeds

Invasive weeds affect many people: their incomes, our environment and damaging heritage values.

#### 1. Environmental damage

- Weeds destroy the environment by displacing native vegetation and replacing food sources and habitat for native animals.
- Aquatic weeds choke waterways and wetlands, destroying precious creek and river systems and their inhabitants.
- Weeds can destroy our enjoyment and recreational use of natural areas.

#### 2. Health problems for humans and animals

- Some plants such as parthenium, rhus tree, Patersons curse and poison ivy can cause many health problems such as severe allergies, asthma, and dermatitis.
- Other plants, such as lantana or oleander are toxic to stock and native animals if eaten.



### 3. Loss of primary industry production

- Weeds cost the Australian economy \$4 billion every year in lost agricultural production.
- The National Farmers' Federation estimates that the average Australian farmer or grazier spends about 30% of their income on pest control, and a large percentage of this is spent on pest plants or weeds.

### How did they get here? How do they spread?

- Weeds can enter the country in many different ways
  - People order plants and seeds via the internet for entry to Australia in the mail
  - Pest plants and organisms can be contained in ships' ballast contents
  - People can unknowingly transport seeds on clothing, equipment, camping gear, vehicles or boats.
  - Imports of seed or food can sometimes contain contaminants which might contain weed seeds.
- Most of our environmental weeds were imported from overseas and planted as garden ornaments. The Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service must clear any plants, bulbs and seeds before they enter the country.
- Weeds can be spread great distances by the wind, water (stormwater, creeks and rivers), birds, stock, native animals, cuttings, vehicles and humans.

### Weeds are everyone's business:

There are strict guidelines and severe penalties for bringing some pest plants species into, or taking them out of, the State. Don't make the mistake of being caught at the border crossing. Check to see whether you are carrying pest plants.

- Don't carry plants across State borders.
- Identify what plants you are carrying.
- Wash down your vehicle to remove plant material or seeds.

### More information

- Contact your local government or weeds officer
- Contact your state or territory government's environment or primary industries department
- Visit [www.weedbusters.info](http://www.weedbusters.info) or [www.weeds.org.au](http://www.weeds.org.au)