



Weeds in the community

Often referred to as weeds, invasive plants are plants that are unwanted in a given situation and may be harmful, dangerous, or economically damaging. Every year, every person in Australia is affected by invasive weeds, either directly or indirectly. Even in the city, the surroundings are alive with invasive garden plants, that are waiting to spread to new places.

Many of these invasive garden plants have attributes that can choke native plants, block water supplies, smother pastures, poison livestock, cause health problems such as allergies and skin rashes or hay fever, and upset the balance of natural ecosystems—to name just a few.

Be on the lookout in your local community for weeds

- Watch out for and report any garden plants invading bushland and roadsides.
- Inform fellow gardeners and friends about how garden plants can spread and tell them of the positive things that you are doing to help.

Pest plants can travel

Often, pest plants are well-equipped to escape the confines of pots and backyards. The wind will blow the seeds and birds will spread both fruit and seed, while irresponsible people make the situation worse by growing and deliberately moving these invasive garden plants to new locations.

Pest plants can be spread easily on vehicles, clothing, camping equipment and machinery or spread to new sites as you travel. Tips for reducing weed escapes:

- Check and clean your vehicle and camping equipment if you have travelled through farming paddocks or natural areas where seed or plant material might get stuck on the vehicle or under wheel arches.
- Do not release aquarium plants into streams or waterways.
- Do not dump plant materials in parks or bushland.

Preventing the spread of weeds is difficult, as many weeds have physical characteristics that allow their seeds and other reproductive parts to be easily transported over long distances.

Weed seeds 'fly' on the wind, ride on river currents, hitch rides on shoes, clothing, vehicles and machinery, and attach themselves to pet fur, livestock and wildlife. Seeds and plant parts can also hide in soil, water, mulch, animal feed and faeces.

For this reason, whenever people or animals move through weed-infested areas, there is a chance that weeds will be spread to new areas.

Highly invasive weeds threaten grazing lands, waterways, national parks and urban environments. In Australia, the cost of weeds on agriculture has been estimated at \$4 billion dollars a year (this excludes the impacts on the environment and community).

One of the most cost-effective ways to control weeds is to stop them spreading and eradicate new infestations.

Control weeds

By controlling weeds (i.e. managing, removing or containing) you can protect nearby native plants, animals and ecosystems.

Tips on restoring a weed infested area:

1. Find out what weeds you're dealing with first—check it is a weed and not a native—get expert advice to make sure



2. Ask for advice on the best method to use for weeds in your particular location before you start work. Sometimes it's best to leave it to professionals, especially if the area will become prone to erosion or a special techniques is required to poison the weeds.
3. Plan your weed removal—gradual removal is best to ensure:
 - that native habitat is not lost and native species will adapt to the changes.
 - new bare areas are not created
 - erosion is not caused, by simultaneously revegetating or regenerating an area.
4. Start small and avoid creating large cleared areas which often allow new and different weeds to establish.
 - remove isolated weeds in areas of good bushland first rather than tackling a dense infestation
 - hand pull plants from moist soil after rain to make it easier on yourself
 - pull or rip down climbers from trees as you may damage native species.
5. Plan your control and work in stages. Tackle outlying weed patches first to slow the rate of weed spread before starting on the worst areas. Replace weeds with natives or non-weedy plants as you go.
6. If your weeds need chemical control, contact your local government or council to find out the best herbicide to use and best method to apply it. You may need permission or qualifications to use herbicide on public land.
7. Destroy weeds before they fruit or set seed to prevent a new generation of weeds growing inside your work area.
8. Decide on the best disposal method for the weeds in the area of control. This is advisable before you start, particularly if working in a large area.
 - When shifting dead weeds take care not to spread any seeds or fragments around that could grow again.

Replacing one problem with another?

Taking out weeds will often open up the area and offer ideal conditions for other weeds to grow. You've then replaced one problem with another. To stop this happening, it's good to be prepared with a restoration plan. Some options are to:

- Provide shelter to help existing native seedlings grow.
- Mulch the area and replace invasive plants with natives from local provenance species or plant non-invasive exotic plants that will be out-competed by natives in time. Check first whether this is appropriate for the environment.
- Don't plant new species but allow natural regeneration to occur. You will need to revisit the site regularly to control weeds that grow back.
- Use selective herbicides so non-weedy plants survive.

The best follow-up method depends on the environment you are working in, so make sure you ask for advice.

More information

- Contact your local retail garden centre (www.ngia.com.au)
- Contact your local government weeds officer or your state/territory government's environment or primary industries department