



Government
of South Australia

WEED IDENTIFICATION NOTES

ANIMAL AND PLANT CONTROL COMMISSION

BLACKBERRY



Dense infestation



Flowers and leaf



Fruit (photo by Kate Blood)

BLACKBERRY



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Blackberry, *Rubus fruticosus*, is a major weed of native vegetation in South Australia introduced from Europe. Blackberries provide delicious and nutritious fruit highly sought after by humans and animals. Once established, chemical control of blackberry is difficult, therefore it is important to keep blackberry off clean properties and to destroy plants before they become established.

Distribution

Eyre Peninsula	- dense infestations in wetter areas
Northern pastoral	- not present
Northern ag districts / Yorke Peninsula	- small, isolated infestations
Murray Mallee	- isolated plants
South East	- scarce in north, widespread in forests in south
Central region	- scattered dense infestations

Impacts

Blackberry is highly invasive in other vegetation and excludes light from the soil surface by its dense canopy. As a result it out competes desirable vegetation, reduces biodiversity in native vegetation, increases the fire hazard and prevents regeneration. The prickly thickets inhibit movement of people, stock and machinery. They may also provide harbour for vermin.

Recognition

An erect shrub growing in dense thickets which can be several metres tall. Stems are long, trailing canes which are green or red-purple. The canes can be smooth or hairy, round, ribbed or angular, but all have sharp thorns 1cm long along their length. The bulk of the thicket is made up of dead canes. Most roots are concentrated in the top 20cm of the soil. There is a well defined crown at ground level which can be 15cm in diameter.

Leaves are divided into 3 or 5 leaflets with serrated edges, dark green on the upper side and lighter green with whitish hairs on the under side. Flowers are 2-3cm in diameter, white or pale pink in clusters on the end of short branches along the canes in their second year. The fruit formed from each flower is an aggregate of berries that changes colour from bright red to black as it ripens. Each berry contains one seed which is 3mm long, triangular, brown and deeply pitted.

There are many different microspecies and cultivars within *Rubus fruticosus*, differing in such characters as leaf shape, hairiness and flower colour. Some thornless cultivars are exempt from proclamation and can be grown for fruit production.

Biology

Blackberry reproduces by seed, root suckers and tip rooting. Seeds germinate in spring but the germination rate is low. Few seedlings survive due to their intolerance to shading. Growth is slow at first and young plants remain small. The canes are biennial, emerging from the crown in winter and developing tip roots in autumn. Flowering shoots appear along these canes in the following summer. After fruiting this cane dies back and is replaced with a new one the next year. Plants may be deciduous and lose their leaves in winter. The size of the clump increases when other plants develop from tip roots and root suckers around the parent plant.

Blackberry is mainly spread by birds and other animals that eat the fruit and drop the seed at a distance. The seeds can also be carried along watercourses.

Further Information:

Parsons, W.T., Cuthbertson, E.G. (2000). *Noxious Weeds of Australia*. 2nd ed. Inkata Press.

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For more advice on recognising and controlling blackberry, contact your local Animal and Plant Control Board:



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