

Bridal Creeper *Asparagus asparagoides*



Photo: PIRSA

Bridal Creeper is a sprawling groundcover and climber. The plant forms dense infestations in native vegetation, displacing understorey plants and degrading fauna habitat.

It is a declared weed under the *Landscape South Australia Act 2019*.

Description

Bridal Creeper has annual shoot growth and a perennial root and rhizome system. The twisting stems appear in June and quickly grow up to 3m in length.

The leaves are borne in groups on short side branches. Leaves and stems turn yellow and die back in late spring and early summer, but can regrow in autumn when the weather is cooler.

The root system makes up the bulk of the plant and consists of tubers grouped along a central rhizome. The tubers store water, energy and nutrients to aid survival over summer and to support rapid shoot growth in winter.

Small white flowers appear along the length of shoots in August and September.

Bridal Creeper produces pea-sized green berries which ripen to red. The berries usually contain two or three black seeds.

Seeds germinate in autumn and winter. Plants take at least three years to reach flowering size. Numerous shoots are produced from one patch of roots and entwine with each other and native vegetation, making it almost impossible to identify individual plants.

Impacts

Bridal Creeper impacts native vegetation by invading the ground and shrub layer of woodlands, mallee and coastal vegetation. It forms a dense canopy that blocks sunlight during the winter and spring growing season, greatly reducing native plant diversity.

Its root system competes with native plants for space and nutrients and suppresses native plant germination.

The annual shedding of bridal creeper leaves increases soil nutrient levels, providing greater opportunity for other weeds to invade.

Distribution

Bridal Creeper is native to South Africa and was introduced to Australia as an ornamental garden plant in the 19th Century.

Bridal Creeper is widespread in the Mount Lofty Ranges, but is most abundant in the higher rainfall areas. A variant, the Western Cape Form, is known also present in the Hills and Fleurieu region.

Bridal Creeper plants can produce more than 1000 berries per square metre. Birds feed on the berries and excrete the seeds creating new infestations. Rabbits and foxes also eat the fruit and disperse seeds. Infestations can spread as the root system slowly expands. Movement of soil containing roots (e.g. by grading) can spread plants further. Dumping of garden waste containing bridal creeper seeds or roots also spreads the weed.

Control Methods

Bridal Creeper has a number of features that make it difficult to control. Its tuber reserves provide a buffer against adverse seasons, it has a wide germination range and can invade undisturbed sites.

Bridal Creeper is still cultivated as a garden plant. Garden waste including clippings and contaminated soil should be contained and disposed of safely. Gardeners should be encouraged to replace existing plants with more suitable species.

Herbicides have been an effective control method. However, because bridal creeper often grows in native vegetation, it can be difficult to avoid impacts on native plants.

The introduction of a rust fungus has been highly effective in controlling bridal creeper. However, follow-up work is required at infested sites to overcome secondary weed growth.

For advice on chemical control techniques please contact a Landscapes Hills and Fleurieu Stewardship Officer or refer to PIRSA Weed Control Handbook at www.pir.sa.gov.au

Declarations

The following sections of the *Landscape SA Act* apply to Bridal Creeper in the Hills and Fleurieu region:

- 186(2) Cannot transport the plant or anything carrying it
- 188(1) Cannot sell the plant
- 188(2) Cannot sell any produce / goods carrying the plant
- 192(2) Landowner must control the plant on their land
- 194 Regional Landscape Board may recover costs for control of weeds on roadsides from adjoining landowners



Photo: PIRSA

Further information

Further information is available through Landscapes Hills and Fleurieu

Mount Barker Office: Cnr Mann & Walker streets, Mount Barker, 5251 (08) 8391 7500

Email: hf.landscapeboard@sa.gov.au



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