

invasive garden plants jump the back fence



Gardeners spend a lot of time weeding garden beds, the vegetable patch and lawns. However, many do not realise that some of the plants they love to grow can escape from cultivation and become a problem.

Many popular and beautiful garden plants are jumping the back fence and invading bushland and farms around Australia. There are over 1, 800 different invasive plants recorded so far. That's over 65% of Australia's weeds that started out as garden plants.

In Victoria, invasive garden plants are a common and often severe problem. Government, landowners, farmers and volunteers are spending millions of dollars and countless hours trying to get rid of garden escapees that have become environmental and agricultural weeds.

Once in the bush, these plants can spread rapidly, compete with local native plants, prevent regeneration and destroy habitat for wildlife. On farming land, they infest crops and pastures and sometimes poison farm animals or contaminate the fleeces of livestock. Some can choke and clog waterways.

These plants are grown in gardens because they are hardy and attractive and sometimes because they have sentimental value. They are usually easy to propagate from seeds or cuttings. Invasive garden plants come in all shapes and sizes including trees, shrubs, climbers, grasses and herbs.

Many plants promoted as 'low water use' or 'drought tolerant' are invasive in Australia's environment and climate. These include some ornamental grasses, succulents and drought-hardy herbs and perennials.

How do they escape?

Have you ever noticed a new plant arrive at your place without you ever planting it? How did it get there? Knowing how garden plants reproduce and spread can give us a better understanding of why they suddenly appear in new areas and how they escape from gardens.

- Plants have often evolved specialised ways of ensuring their seeds are dispersed by animals. Birds, foxes, rabbits and flying foxes eat fruit and seed which they can carry to nearby bushland. The seeds of Cotoneaster, Firethorn, Privet, Olive, Bridal Creeper and other invasive garden plants can be

carried for many kilometres in the digestive tracts of animals after being eaten.

- Pets and people carry burrs and other sticky seeds such as Forget-me-not from gardens to bushland on fur, clothing and shoes.
- Wind can blow seeds many kilometres – Pampas Grass can produce 100 000 seeds per plume that can be carried up to 30 kilometres.
- Seeds and other plant parts capable of growing can wash down drains into waterways or be carried by flood waters to areas where they can establish and spread. These include Montbretia, Willow and Carex.
- Uncaring people dump garden waste over back fences, on vacant land or in bushland and forests. Plants that often grow out of piles of waste include weedy grasses, English Ivy, Periwinkle, Oxalis and other plants with bulbs and corms, cacti and other succulents.
- People empty aquarium or pond contents down drains or into water bodies and could spread plants like Water Hyacinth and Salvinia.
- Seeds and plant parts are carried on roadside slashers and graders, mowers, vehicle tyres, tools, boats, trailers, and camping equipment. Weedy grasses, Bulbil Watsonia and Spanish Heath are examples of plants often spread by machinery.

How you can help?

There are many ways in which gardeners can help reduce the number of plants escaping from gardens:

- Replace invasive plants with safer alternatives.
- Dispose of garden waste and aquarium or pond contents responsibly.
- Ensure that items of garden equipment, including mowers and tools, are cleaned before using them in other areas.
- Watch for and report garden plants invading into local bushland.
- Join a Friends or Landcare Group and help care for local bushland.

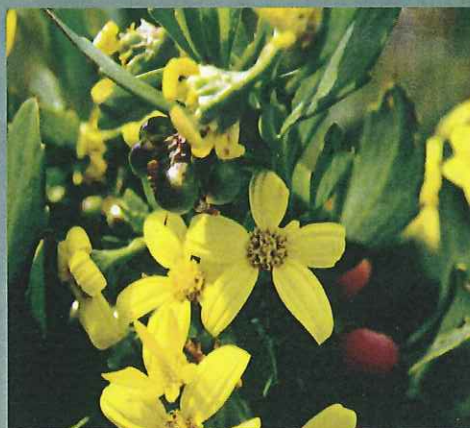


- Tell friends, family and neighbours about invasive garden plants.
- Get involved in national Weedbuster activities:
www.weedbusters.info



Learning from your garden

The way a plant behaves in your garden may provide a good indication of what that plant might do outside your garden. If a plant produces a large amount of seed and many seedlings come up, there is a good chance that the plant can escape and proliferate in the bush or on agricultural land. If a plant sends out runners above or below ground and starts taking over the garden, it most likely can do the same elsewhere. If you have tried to remove a plant from your garden, only to find millions come up in its place, then such a plant is likely to become a major community problem. The observant gardener will quickly identify plants with such weedy characteristics and remove them, before a wider problem is generated. Keep in mind that seed from a plant may be spreading far and wide without that plant being a problem in the garden. It may require several years or a change of conditions (such as a fire in local bushland or the death of a large garden tree) for the extent of the seed reserve to become apparent.



Sharing your garden

Gardeners can be generous people. They give cuttings and seeds to friends and family, and dig up seedlings to provide to local fetes. Usually the plants that are swapped and given as gifts are the ones that are easy to multiply. Unfortunately, these are also often the most invasive species. Please be careful to avoid spreading the problem from your garden to others.

Garden waste disposal

If you have seeds, corms or bulbs to dispose of, place them in a plastic bag and tie a knot at the top. Then

put that bag in another bag and seal before placing in the garbage. This is called double-bagging. Double-bagging limits the chances of seeds escaping before the material is deep buried in landfill.

You can help by composting other garden waste at home, recycling it through local council collection services or taking it to the local rubbish tip or recycling station. Make sure that non-compostible material will be properly buried in deep landfill and that the operators are following Australian Standards for composting green waste. The spread of many invasive garden plants is assisted when garden waste covered in

seeds is mulched without composting and is then layed on garden beds.

When taking garden waste to the tip, please remember to cover trailers so seeds and cuttings don't fall off and invade roadsides.

Cooking in boiling water is a simple, clean method to denature small quantities of seeds, tubers or corms from plants such as Gladiolus, Madiera Vine and Bridal Creeper. Material treated in this way can then be safely composted. Some material can also be solarised in sealed garbage bags layed in full sun for several months.

Ordering seeds from overseas

Imported plants, bulbs and seeds, including those ordered over the internet or through mail-order, must be cleared before coming into Australia. Bringing in new plants without authorisation is unlawful and puts our natural environment, farmland and economy at great risk. Check with the Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service (AQIS) before ordering plant material from overseas. See 'Quarantine' in the White Pages or the AQIS web site at: www.aqis.gov.au



Nursery industry

The Victorian Government and the Nursery and Garden Industry Victoria (NGIV) have been working together to raise industry and gardener awareness about invasive garden plants. Agreement has been reached to remove from sale numerous plants that are known problems. Awareness amongst garden writers and presenters is also growing. Purchasers of plants or garden services can help by asking about the weediness of plants before they buy. Plant suppliers can help by accurately identifying and labelling the plants they provide and strictly avoiding plants that are known weeds.



For further information, contact your:

- Local reputable nursery or garden centre:
www.ngia.com.au
- Local government weed or conservation officer:
www.mav.asn.au
- Local Catchment Management Authority:
www.vcmc.vic.gov.au
- Department of Primary Industries, Victoria:
www.dpi.vic.gov.au
- Department of Sustainability and Environment, Victoria: www.dse.vic.gov.au
- DPI and DSE Customer Service Centre: ph 136 186

Other useful references:

List of invasive garden plants in Australia: www.wwf.org.au

Cooperative Research Centre for Australian Weed Management: www.weeds.crc.org.au

Noxious weeds in Australia, and Weeds of National Significance: www.weeds.org.au

Identification of weeds (usually a fee is required):
Identification Desk, National Herbarium of Victoria,
Birdwood Avenue, South Yarra, Vic 3141, ph 03 9252 2300



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