



# Managing Weeds on Farms

Fact Sheet series for the Small Rural Landholder

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## What do we mean by weeds?

Weeds have been defined as a plant growing where it isn't wanted; however, not all weeds are noxious weeds. There are many plants which can be opportunist pasture weeds because of poor soil fertility, overstocking or under stocking and poor grazing management.

Alternatively there are invasive noxious weeds which have no agricultural value, grow to the exclusion of other desirable plants, degrade the value of the land and require a considerable commitment of time and resources to eradicate.

## Common pasture weeds

Broadleaf pasture weeds such as capeweed and flatweed are often indicators of a problem with pasture management.

### Capeweed

Thrives in an environment where properties are heavily stocked particularly during the summer and autumn months. This typically can lead to areas of bare soil where there is little if any protective vegetative cover to retain soil moisture for new emerging pasture.

Capeweed will often germinate with the first autumn showers but rarely wilt away and die if there is no follow up rain, whereas other grasses and clovers may germinate but not persist.

When significant autumn rains do arrive the capeweed already has a flying start on any new pasture growth and will quickly dominate those areas to the detriment of other plants. Without much competition through the winter months capeweed utilises its lateral growth characteristic to cover the ground and emerge in the spring to quickly flower, set seed and die away, leaving an enlarged bare area of soil to again populate the following year.

### Flat weed

Flat weed thrives in a high stocking rate environment where livestock are left in the same paddock for months at a time. This allows animals to selectively graze out the

desirable pasture species and prompts the growth of flat weed, which is less palatable. By growing flat to the ground it is difficult for livestock to graze.

### Control strategies

We can encourage competition from pasture species by:

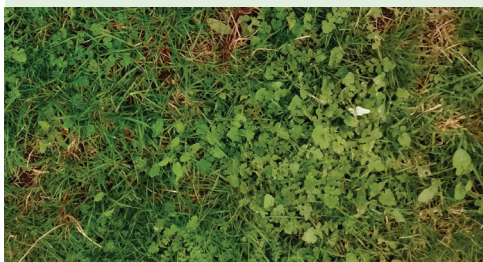
- reducing stock numbers,
- rotationally grazing paddocks; and
- retaining more vegetative cover to protect our soils over the drier months.

Where there is a need for significant supplementary feeding over the summer months it can be a good idea to confine stock to one smaller sacrifice paddock with good shade and water so as to protect the soils of remaining pasture paddocks for the coming autumn germination and growth period.

### Other species

Other common pasture grass weeds such as sweet vernal grass and bent grass are found on properties where soil fertility is poor. This can be associated with increased soil acidity and low levels of available phosphorous.

Where there has been a history of no stock and only annual slashing or cutting for hay, these paddocks can be expected to be grass-dominant and the feed less palatable for livestock.



above left: spray capeweed  
left: capeweed flower



# Managing Weeds on Farms

COMMON  
GROUND



## Key management considerations

- Learn how to identify your important weed species
- Understand their lifecycle and when they are best controlled
- Develop your own weed action plan which outlines WHEN and HOW you will treat different weeds
- Seek expert advice on which herbicide to use
- Thoroughly read the label on chemical products
- Don't allow chemical spraying to drift on to your neighbours' property or damage non-target species
- Sometimes hand hoeing is the simple and chemical-free option

## Reference

Department of Environment & Primary Industries (2014). Invasive Plant Classifications.



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## Noxious weeds

### Landholder responsibilities

Most regions of Victoria have long lists of noxious weeds but many landholders are not aware of their responsibilities and how to prioritise the weeds they need to deal with.

There are four categories of noxious weeds under the Catchment and Land Protection Act 1994. These are plants which can or do cause environmental or economic harm or pose a risk to human health (D.E.P.I 2014).

- **State Prohibited Weeds** are in the highest category and where found and identified on any property it is the state government's responsibility to eradicate them.
- **Regionally Prohibited Weeds** vary across different Catchment Management Authority (CMA) regions and are weeds in that region which aren't widely distributed but represent a threat. With reasonable effort they can be eradicated and every landholder including public authorities are expected to take the necessary measures with a goal to eradicating these weeds.
- **Regionally Controlled Weeds** are usually widespread and whilst eradication is now unlikely, landholders are expected to implement control measures to prevent their growth and further spread.
- **Restricted Weeds** pose a risk when sold as a contaminant in hay or other plant material and subsequently transported to other areas.

Two of our most common *Regionally Controlled Weeds* are blackberry and gorse. These are weeds which too commonly we see degrading the landscape and invading neighbouring properties.

## Blackberry management

Although appearing a daunting task, blackberry is relatively easy to overcome with modern woody weed herbicides and follow up work over a 2-3 year period.

## Gorse management

Gorse is a much tougher invasive perennial weed, but left unchecked will completely overrun a property leaving it valueless for any agricultural activity.

## What can you do?

### Getting started

- Most local government offices will have coloured brochures or booklets to help identify local weed species to help get started. Even if you don't intend doing the work yourself it is worth researching the biology and lifecycle of the weed you want to manage so you understand how it grows and the optimum timing for different methods of control. That way you will be much better placed to have a meaningful discussion with a contractor.
- Farm supply businesses selling herbicides should be able to help with plant identification (take in a sample in a plastic bag), chemical product selection and provide details of local contractors who can help if the task is beyond your capacity.
- If you do intend to engage a contractor make sure they hold the appropriate Commercial Operator Licence issued by the Department of Environment and Primary Industries. Also be aware that some of the herbicides for woody weed control will require an Agricultural Chemical Users Permit (ACUP) if you intend to use them yourself, so check with your supplier before you purchase and ask for an alternative product if necessary.

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