

# European blackberry

*(Rubus fruticosus aggregate)*

European blackberry is a sprawling shrub that forms dense spiny thickets. It was planted in colonial times as a food plant but has become widely established as a pest plant of native vegetation and pasture. European blackberry is a declared weed under the *Landscape South Australia Act 2019*.



## Description

European blackberry is a fast-growing semi-deciduous shrub that forms thickets of long spiny canes. Canes are biennial, and can grow at rates of up to 7 m per year.

First year canes are vegetative and establish new roots and shoots where they touch the ground. Second year canes grow from the leaf axils of the primary canes and produce flowers and fruit in late spring and summer.

The roots have a woody crown and can extend to a depth of 4 metres. Numerous secondary roots grow horizontally from the crown and can generate new shoots.

Clusters of white or pink flowers are produced in late summer.

As berries ripen in autumn they change colour from green to red to black. Leaves are shed in winter.

## Impacts

Blackberry thickets can quickly crowd out native vegetation. By excluding ground-layer vegetation they can promote soil erosion, particularly along watercourses.

In pastures, established blackberry thickets progressively encroach on new areas, reducing land productivity.

Thickets provide shelter for a range of feral animals including rabbits, feral pigs, starlings and blackbirds. Thickets can become a significant fire hazard.

Thickets can also have some value as shelter for native animals such as bandicoots.

In production forestry, blackberry infestations can impede access and replanting operations.

Weed identification note © Colin G Wilson

## Distribution

In the Hills and Fleurieu region, blackberry is widely distributed where annual rainfall exceeds 350 mm. It is most common in watercourses and wetlands.

Blackberry fruit are a food source for native and exotic animals, which disperse the seed over wide distances.

Plants spread clonally from the sprawling canes and roots, as well forming new plants from seed. This enables European blackberry to form large, dense infestations.

Germination is poor in shaded areas. New infestations often develop when shade is removed by disturbance such as fire or vegetation clearance. However established plants tolerate a high degree of shade and grow readily in the understorey of native vegetation.

## Control methods

The major challenges in managing blackberry are to prevent its spread, to control existing infestations and to prevent reinfestation at control sites.

A range of control techniques are available including burning, slashing, grazing, grubbing, chemical spraying and biological control. An effective control program will involve a combination of these.

Management programs must be planned to minimise impacts on native species, and staged over a number of years.

For advice on chemical control techniques contact Landscapes Hills and Fleurieu on (08) 8391 7500 and please refer to the Weed Control Handbook for declared plants in South Australia. You can find it on Biosecurity SA's website at [www.pir.sa.gov.au](http://www.pir.sa.gov.au)

## Declarations

The following sections of the *Landscape SA Act* apply to European blackberry in the Hills and Fleurieu region (excluding detached fruit and specific cultivars):

186(1) Cannot import the plant to South Australia

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



## Further information

Further information is available through Landscapes Hills and Fleurieu

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