

# Pest plant - African Boxthorn

*(Lycium ferocissimum)*

Fact sheet January 2019

## What is it?

African Boxthorn is a large perennial shrub with small, bright green leaves and densely tangled twigs that end in large spines. Boxthorn was originally introduced to Australia from South Africa and planted as hedges for shelter and barriers to stock movement.

## What does it look like?

### Size

African Boxthorn shrubs commonly reach 2-3m in height and up to 5m across. In open areas, what appears as one plant will often be several plants tangled together.



### Branches

Branches are stiff, hairless and end in sturdy thorns up to 8cm long. They occur at right angles along the branches creating a dense, tangled shrub.

### Leaves

Leaves are oval, bright green and fleshy, 3.5cm long and 2cm wide. Leaves occur in clusters long branchlets and at the base of thorns. Plants are sometimes deciduous in winter or during drought; if so, new leaves appear in spring or after rain.

### Flowers and fruit

Flowers are produced mostly in spring and summer. They are small (approximately 12mm across), white with purple blotches and have 5 petals.

African Boxthorn have distinctive smooth, round red-orange berries measuring 5 – 12 mm in diameter. Each berry can contain 30 – 70 seeds.



## Why is it a problem?

Boxthorn invades native vegetation, alters habitat and overruns pastures. It forms dense impenetrable thickets that reduce access for stock, native animals, people and vehicles. Boxthorn thickets often harbour feral cats, leading to impacts for farmers due to increased prevalence of disease, e.g. toxoplasmosis, in sheep. Boxthorns also harbour feral rats and starlings which feed on boxthorn berries and thus contribute to the spread of boxthorn.

## Distribution

African Boxthorn is widely distributed on the eastern end of Kangaroo Island, particularly in coastal and subcoastal areas. It is also found on the north coast as far west as Western River Cove. It has spread from original plantings into pastures and native vegetation.

## How is it spread?

Boxthorn produces large numbers of orange-red berries that contain many seeds. The berries are eaten by birds and other animals, then deposited elsewhere. The seeds can germinate at any time of the year and seedlings compete with other shrub species. Plants can start to flower and produce seed at two years old.

## How do we control it?

### Take action early

Destroy any plants found before setting seed to prevent infestation. Where infestations are large, control isolated and outlying plants first. Control can include physical and chemical methods. Be aware that African Boxthorn is persistent and can regrow from root segments, fruits can ripen on cut branches and plants can defoliate after chemical treatment but then

recover. It is imperative that any efforts of control are followed by ongoing monitoring and treatment.

### Physical removal

Seedlings can be hand pulled if the ground is soft. For extensive infestations in pasture, use mechanical removal with a tractor and blade. Stack the plants in an open area and then burn when permissible to do so.

*It is essential to follow up with chemical treatment as the plants will reshoot from any roots remaining.*

### Control with herbicide

There are a variety of methods available. **Foliar spray** is generally limited to small plants and regrowth to avoid off-target damage to native vegetation. The **cut stump** method is also to be used when plants are actively growing. Stems are cut horizontally no higher than 10cm from the ground and the cut surface is painted immediately (within 10 seconds) with herbicide, using a hand held spray bottle or brush.

For advice on chemical control techniques, contact the Natural Resources Centre in Kingscote or download the *Weed control handbook for declared plants in South Australia* at:

[http://www.pir.sa.gov.au/biosecurity/weeds\\_and\\_pest\\_animals/weeds\\_in\\_sa](http://www.pir.sa.gov.au/biosecurity/weeds_and_pest_animals/weeds_in_sa).

### Rehabilitation

African Boxthorn infestations can occupy large areas. When they are removed it is essential to replace them with more appropriate plants. This may be pastures or native vegetation. Sometimes African boxthorn may shelter native fauna, *e.g.* Little penguins. If this is the case, a staged removal should be undertaken, and the

area revegetated with native plants to replace lost habitat.

### Declarations

The following sections of the NRM Act apply to African boxthorn on Kangaroo Island:

175(2) Cannot transport the plant, or any material or equipment containing that plant, on a public road

177(1) Cannot sell the plant

177(2) Cannot sell any produce / goods carrying the plant

182(2) Landowner must control the plant on their land

185(1) NRM authority may recover costs for control of weeds on roadsides from adjoining landowners

## For more information

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