Bridal creeper

Bridal creeper *(Asparagus asparagoides)* was introduced from southern Africa as a garden plant and is now a declared weed in South Australia and a Weed of National Significance. It is an invasive climber in woodlands and is found along many roadsides within the region.

What does it look like?

Bridal creeper has small white flowers and sharply pointed, shiny green leaves about 1-4cm long and up to 2cm wide with fine parallel veins. Leaves alternate on small branches extending from a slender central stem. At each joint the stem changes direction in a slight zig zag manner. It produces pea-sized red berries which usually contain two or three black seeds.

Bridal creeper grows in a wide variety of habitats, including orchards. It can grow in most soils, although it's most common closer to the coast, where it invades woodlands and other open coastal vegetation. It is particularly vigorous in alkaline sandy soils and also thrives in areas high in nutrients such as creeks and drainage lines.

What is its impact?

Unlike many other weeds, bridal creeper is capable of colonising undisturbed ecosystems.

As a climber, it forms dense thickets of foliage that blanket the ground and surrounding vegetation. The plant flowers in late winter, producing numerous red berries in late spring. These are attractive food for birds, rabbits and foxes which spreads the seeds over large areas.

It takes three years for a vine to get to maturity and to flower and produce berries. The plant can produce up to 1000 seeds per square metre, and these are viable for up to four years within the soil.

Bridal creeper also produces underground tubers that form dense mats below the soil surface, which is considered to be more than 90% of the plant's biomass, thus preventing germination of native plants.

Foliage dies off in summer due to lack of water, but tuber reserves enable bridal creeper to survive summer drought. Bridal creeper is also frost tolerant.

What can you do?

Conventional control methods can be problematic. The use of herbicides can affect non-target species and infestations can be difficult to access. Isolated plants can be treated with a recommended herbicide applied by spot spraying.

As infestations become larger, a staged approach for removal is advisable to ensure that treated areas are not reinfested.

Biological control

Biological control (biocontrol) may offer a more effective solution for management and control of bridal creeper. However, it will take many years for the biocontrol agents to reduce the density of bridal creeper due to the huge reserves stored underground in tubers.

Current biocontrol agents are:

- The leafhopper Zygina species;
- The rust fungus *Puccinia myrsiphylli*
- The leaf beetle Crioceris species.

Both the rust fungus and leafhopper damage bridal creeper by attacking the leaves. The rust fungus also infects stems and leaves. Severe infestations of the rust fungus and leafhopper results in reduced photosynthesis, premature defoliation and reduced tuber production. The leaf beetle consumes young leaves and shoots. It is still early days for this agent, and more work is required to determine the best time and number of insects to release. To remove bridal creeper from the garden dig out as much of the underground tubers as possible, put it into a black plastic bag and leave to cook in full sun for several months before disposing. Do not add to compost.

Image: Leaves affected by rust fungus.

What are your responsibilities?

Bridal creeper is a declared plant under the *Landscape South Australia Act 2019*. Landholders must control the plant on their property. Sale or movement of plants or goods containing plants or plant parts is prohibited within the state.

More information

Email: ny.landscapeboard@sa.gov.au
Phone: 08 8841 3444

www.landscape.sa.gov.au/ny