

PLUME MOTH

Biocontrol for horehound

Plume moth (*Peterophorus spilodactylus*) is a biological control for horehound, a declared plant under the *Landscape South Australia Act 2019*.



What is horehound?

Horehound (*Marrubium vulgare*) is an invasive, perennial weed that is tolerant to drought and poor soils. It invades disturbed ground such as roadsides, grazing land and waste ground.

Horehound flavour taints meat if grazed and the burrs contaminate wool, reducing the value of the fleece.

How does plume moth work as a biocontrol?

Plume moth larvae are small green caterpillars that can severely damage the growth of horehound plants. They feed on the plants growing tips and then work their way down the shoot, progressively defoliating the stem. This weakens the plant and reduces the number of flowers and seeds produced.

Large numbers of plume moth larvae may limit the spread and density of horehound infestations and allow the establishment or reintroduction of more desirable plants.

How do I disperse it?

Plume moth are best collected and released in late autumn and early spring, when they are in the larval or pupal stage. These stages are the most practical to work with, as the insects are less mobile and easier to handle and transport.

To locate larvae, inspect the horehound plant for signs of feeding, such as chewed edges or holes in the leaves. Larvae are mostly found feeding near the tops of stems, where the youngest leaves are located.



When larvae are observed, pinch off the stem below the affected leaves, this preserves the larvae's food source during collection and reduces handling. Any burrs should be removed from the collected stems to avoid spreading horehound seeds.

Collected material can be stored in a ventilated container for up to a few days if needed. Additional horehound stems and leaves should be included to keep the larvae fed and the container humid.



During dispersal, place the collected stems directly into the centre of healthy horehound plants at the release site. The larvae will naturally move onto the new host plants.

Spread larvae across multiple plants to prevent overcrowding and reduce competition.

Where can I source it?

Landholders can contact the Northern and Yorke Landscape Board and register for plume moth distribution. A Landscape Officer will contact registered landholders to organise collection at the appropriate time.

Note: Horehound is a declared plant and is prohibited from movement on public roads. Outside of the Board's distribution events landholders are only permitted to move horehound material on the same land parcel as collected.

Acknowledgements

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More information

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